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KILBURN

A WHITE HAND.

A Story of Noblesse Oblige.

BY

ELLA FARMAN.

It is an old legend of just men, *Noblesse oblige*, or superior advantages bind you to larger generosity.

EMERSON.

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TO

H. A. H.

IN SWEET REMEMBRANCE.

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A WHITE HAND.

CHAPTER I.

MY PICTURES.

"In my dreams I gather
Each of you in memory's arms,
And we sail all night together."

I HAVE pictures of them all — Millicent and Trixie, Ralph, Cecil, and Jack. They were each dear friends of mine, even Cecil Challis. There was a certain open downrightness about him, despite his aristocratic reserve; an open scorn of sham and meanness, despite his own larger sins, which won many a liking, and keeps his memory green.

It was Millicent herself who gave me these pictures. It was at the time when the toil and the tragedy of her life came to the end, and she went out into the peaceful sunshine quite as if she had closed a door behind her — brave and weary Millicent!

I think she gave them to me because she shrank with some delicate instinct, some fine, subtile loyalty towards Ralph, from taking any record or reminder, written or pictured, into the happier life she was entering; for the evening before she was married she

gave me, with the pictures, also a package of letters, a journal of hers, vivid and chasmal, with long blanks and mere sentences, various dear old books with pencil marks upon their leaves, and pressed flowers between them, together with some little personal ornaments, which I remembered well, and knew all about.

"I know you will not misunderstand me," she said, "and so I will tell you that I could not quite bear to destroy them, or to know that they were destroyed. It would seem to me a species of suicide: they were a part of a life that was so intense, so bitter and — yes, truly — so blessed," she added, with a smile such as few of us ever come to wear this side heaven.

Brave Millicent! She might well and serenely wear that radiant smile after turning into discipline, and strength, and beauty, and blessing, all her own mistakes, all her own sorrows, all the wilfulness, and recklessness, and sin, and despair of the others!

I have taken the pictures out of my desk since I wrote the last paragraph, and looked at them long, gone back into the past, sighed, and grown glad again.

They are rare portraits, each intense with the soul of the original — yes, even this one of girlish Trixie is intense with its very absence of all thought and care. Poor little butterfly! so bent upon pleasure and all the merry nothings of human life, disporting herself so lightly amid its mysteries. There are two pictures of her; this one in the locket that Cecil Challis had — how did she dare give it to him! — and this other, which later belonged to Millicent, taken some time in the years of that most bitter and blessed widowhood. It is a face thin, and sweet, and sad — it is so wistful, too, as of one who has hard work

in learning to believe that a life of noble employments and rewards still lies before her. These are the faces of Jack De Riemer's two wives; but *he* never has looked upon the one which Millicent's brother had — poor Trixie herself never knew that it came into Millicent's possession, does not know that now it is in mine. She was like hundreds more of women who never bestow thought as to those who shall finally look upon the pictures they lightly give, and the letters they lightly write.

Two pictures of Beatrix De Riemer, and three of Millicent Challis. The first of the beautiful three was always my own — my schoolmate Millicent in the gaiter-length dresses and the long braids — unapproachably proud and sweet even then. The second is the one she once gave Ralph, and received back together with her letters. She did not bestow it until the bestowal had become a mere duty, and the irksomeness of duty touched the picture in the taking — it could not have been a very satisfactory portrait for Ralph to turn to. It was simply that of the scholarly and exclusive girl so well known in the county society; was simply the face the world judged her by so many years. As just a picture, the intellectual brow, the large, penetrating critical eyes, the cold, clear light upon the face, the princess-like poise of the exquisite head, make it a striking one when you remember that it is of a girl only nineteen. In those days we used to call her our Lady Jane Grey, and Ralph Schumann, the high school teacher with whom she read Greek at home for a couple of years, was very properly her friend, Roger Ascham.

There is another picture, taken not a year later,

which I often wish I had. I was with her when she sat for it. It was sent to Jack, and I suppose he has it still; that was our own dear, radiant, home Millicent.

The third picture is the one she gave me last winter, just before the wedding — Millicent at thirty; but on her face there is an indescribable look of youth, and innocence, and sweetness, blended with all the conscious power of self-reliant womanhood. It is a face of gladness and light indescribable.

The remaining portraits are of the men — Cecil, darkly quiet and handsome, quite as I last saw him. Millicent herself found it in Trixie's deserted chamber, and brought it away. Trixie never made inquiry concerning it; not then, or ever afterwards. We both think she never cared to see it again, perhaps utterly forgot it. Poor, bewildered Trixie, she truly was not so deeply sinning as sinned against.

The picture of Jack is quite an old picture; but it is a good copy still of his æsthetic face; and his elegance of demeanor and the quality of his nature are each indicated.

Ralph's, too, is old. It is like, and still unlike, the man of to-day. With its lofty, narrow forehead, its midnight eyes, and its shaven face, it is as grave and sombre as the portrait of a Spanish priest.

"You may think it strange that I can give you this too," she said, "but I do not marry *this* Ralph; *this* Ralph I did not love."

She took up the later picture of Trixie. "This alone is the face I care to recall. This alone is the face that brings me no pain." She kissed it tenderly as she placed it among the others. "I would not part with

it, only I do not like to give you the first one without it. Looking at this you will never forget that the evil, and the trouble, and the pain are now all things of the past. Is it not, dear, knowledge that the Father rewards us not according to the mere measure of what we have done, but in all the breadth and fullness of what we have longed and striven to do and be?"

Ah, if it *is* so, Millicent, yours will henceforth be a blessed life on earth and in heaven!

CHAPTER II.

LADY OF HONOR.

"Look close on my heart; see the worst of its sinning:
It is not yours to-day for the yesterday's winning."

CHALLIS PLACE was the great house of Willowwater, and the Challis family its great people.

Any village in republican America, quite as commonly as in a kingdom or empire, has its "place" and its "family," is subject to this certain fine and intangible "government by nobles," as Webster hath it. The most of us — let us confess it — like a show-place to point out to a stranger as well as any of the old world people. Perhaps even after the universal republic is ushered in, it will be the same, since some one family or families, lifted out of the crowd, and dust, and noise of common humanity, seems to be the inevitable result of a certain serene conjunction of wealth, culture, and breeding.

The Challises were not the wealthiest family in town; there the Vandeburgs and Cloughs outranked them, but they were the Challises. That is to say, they were a family with a genealogy on the other side of the water, and whose men, born here, kept the name honorable on old college records, honorable on like records through each fresh generation. We were all duly aware that it was the one name which linked

rural Willowwater to the great world. It was often found on laurelled lists, bishops, foreign ministers, *savants*, and poets being alike written adown the family roll-call. Its ladies were acknowledged queens of society, fair, slender Millicent of Willowwater no less than the haughty Helen or the radiant Regina Challis of the Philadelphia Challises. She was, indeed, quite the peer of them all, since it was she, instead of her brother Cecil, who had inherited the scholarly tastes of her father, the bishop, and the usual dower of beauty and grace as well. Her great, cold, steady gray eyes never lowered their white lids in any presence as to her superior; her cold pride, indeed, was her only flaw. But if she was a silent Lady Jane Grey to half the world, she was a charming Sevigné in her own circles; and to an inner ring just rare, sweet, wilful Millicent, while only one — one or two — possessed the knowledge that she was not so happy that the angels need "go envying her."

Willowwater was far inland, and ancient as American time goes; a place of leisure, and shaded streets, with silver streams willow-skirted, and broad meadows outside. The slight noise and tumult were confined to the small, new portion of the village surrounding the railway station and the factories. The Challis house itself was an old mansion of the colonial times, and, taking all its massive beauty together, had been a hundred years in making — no less would have reared those oaks and elms, which gathered in stately group and avenue, to their majestic and venerable altitude.

The mansion was quite the old English idea, oaken, and strong, and wide, with a tower and many a wing

and rounded angle, with massive doors, and in more than one portion picturesque, with the quaint, broad windows of diamond lattice which the painters love. The long French windows, certain spaces of stained glass, and the lovely balconies had come in with Millicent's mother. Millicent herself grew up, and in time went over the house, and moaned concerning its "loss of unity," and then concluded that a bay window and other verandas would not spoil the agreeable confusion; and so the venerable mansion grew in shade, and nooks, and *plaisance* year by year. Having stately foundations, there was no fear of degenerating into the bizarre. The principal hall itself was quite as spacious as many of the new factory cottages. It had the polished, slippery floor of the old English halls; but in our day that was strewn with soft, bright rugs, and skirted with rows of tall blossoming plants — fragrant orange trees, rosy oleanders, and golden-red azaleas: in a modern house these trees would have transformed the hall into a crowded conservatory; here the greenery and the bloom was but an exquisite border and finish for the long walk from door to distant door. This hall was a picture gallery as well. In stately succession hung portraits of the statesmen and generals belonging among the dead and gone English Challises. There were, too, among these dim mellow portraits, more than one court beauty painted by Copley — Millicent's great-great aunts and great-grandmothers in brocades, and ruffs, and stomachers, and powdered hair, but not among them all one fairer or more like a princess than our own tall, slender American girl.

The mansion, with its ancient gray massiveness thus

gracefully garnitured with veranda, balcony, bay windows, rare roses, and vines was scarce visible in summer from the distant street. Various drives led up thither through arched gates, winding along under the majestic trees, now lost, now visible again crossing a piece of sunny green lawn. Indeed, the house was most clearly to be seen on grand company nights, when the whole place would seem to emerge from its aristocratic seclusion, lighted in tower and wing, hall and drawing-room, while every drive and walk was pricked out in rainbowy, starry outline.

But the silver splash and spray of the fountains, the singing and chatter of foreign birds hanging in cages among the trees about the house, the park-like beauty of the entire place, made the street a favorite drive and walk even for those who never entered the house. It was a glimpse of that leisurely care-free life we all like to contemplate, to see now and then the strange, fine carriages go glittering along the drives, to catch glimpses of the bright groups gathered on the croquet-grounds, or another day sallying forth upon distant horseback excursions. There were, indeed, certain months of the year when the place was all fashion, and flash, and glitter, when the entire village was brightened by the presence of gay strangers. Then there were other times when the greater portion of the house was shut up, and the family absent; and other pleasanter seasons still, when the mansion was quieter far than any other house in town, and Millicent and her mother lived a leisurely and retired life, busy with their sewing, and flowers, and birds, and books, and letters, and their very small circle of duties and home friends.

It is such a period of seclusion now. The time is midsummer, and afternoon. The house is dim from room to room with an enforced twilight. Jalousies, white draperies, ices, fans, and stillness are the rule. There is little exertion, conversation, or amusement until much later in the day. Both mother and daughter are serenely indifferent to all the modern midsummer journeying about and tarrying in crowded caravansaries; are also serenely impatient of certain latter-day theories concerning the cheerful health-giving properties of the sunlight; and when Millicent derides Sydney Smith on account of especial passages of his fine writing, Mrs. Challis smiles indulgently, and secretly is of her daughter's opinion.

Millicent fans the roseate glow from her delicate cheek, and curls her lip, and entertains her with a bit of half merry, half contemptuous scolding as she further reflects. "It is much the same thing as a sunstroke," she says, "to be placed, even in one's fancy, in one of his '*glorified rooms.*' Imagine one of them, mother, now at three, post meridiem. The apartment to be 'glorified' has a fine south-western exposure. The shades are drawn up. The life-giving sunshine of the hygienists is flooding in with its haloes, and prisms, and golden beams, and other 'glories,' until the heated furniture is fit to broil you, and the colors of the carpet ooze out visibly, the flowers wilt in the vases, one's self turns red in the face, and the house a buzzing museum of insects. 'Glorified rooms,' forsooth! a pretty enough phrase to quote, and the fine writers quote accordingly, and admonish the house-builder to build the living-room many-windowed and fronting the sunrise. I should like to tell them,

mother, that *our* servants *have* such a kitchen, and close the blinds religiously every morning the summer through. Man, for six thousand years," she continues, sententiously, "has been contriving means to protect himself against nature; and I certainly feel no wish to return to the unmitigated sunshine and the cracked grains of the savage."

But ices, and cooled fruits, and gossamer robes, and all the mansion's "boundless contiguity of shade," have failed, visibly, to render Mademoiselle Millicent comfortable this afternoon.

She is up in her own room in the eastern tower. It is a great, cool, shadowy apartment, furnished in white and bamboo, the only bits of positive color in the room being the blocks of rainbowy light which lie on the soft, gray carpet, cast from the great oval stained glass windows, and the one sweet pink Provence rose in the vase on the writing-table.

At this table, behind her ebony desk, she is sitting, biting her pen and wrinkling her forehead quite after the manner of more lowly-born maidens.

A couple of letters lie before her — the one she is writing, the one she is answering. Both envelopes are exposed to view. The one directed to "Mr. Ralph Schumann, B—— Theological Seminary," is superscribed in as clear and definite a hand as the other, which bears her own name.

The demoiselle, so flushed and irritated, has been endeavoring to write a love-letter. It is not at all a romantic task, being her duty, one of those she so willfully took upon herself something more than two years ago. She has written many a dainty one during this time, as, indeed, an openly engaged maiden may;

written them lightly and sweetly, to the infinite satisfaction of both writer and reader, quite in nature's own way when doing pleasurable things, as a bird sings, or a flower blows, or a zephyr goes whispering from horizon to horizon. But for six months now the graceful knack has been gradually dropping away from her, until it has come to this — the letter must be composed, something as a student makes Latin verse, sentence by sentence, upon one sheet and copied out upon another.

She reads over again and again, much like the distracted versifier, what she has written. It is pretty enough and well enough, only it is not a love-letter. Her sense of honor reproaches her with that keenly. Her dissatisfaction with it is heightened by the fact that, after all her careful labor, it covers but a leaf; and the fair gentlewoman knows that with her leisure she is without excuse for sending an epistle so brief — one which, withal, is so carefully studied, so far as it exists at all. "Besides," she divines, "it is quite as some elderly person might write to a school-boy in whom she was kindly interested; it is advice instead of dear interest, counsel instead of heart's love; indeed, altogether, it is quite shameful of me."

She tries again. She composes another leaf; yes, that is accurately the word: it is purely a task of the brain.

Nothing, save the sincerity of her indifference, is visible in this second effort. "My dear Ralph," after she has written it, appears the same as if she had worded it, "My dear Sir." She fancies his eyes, too, will detect the cheat. Her acknowledgment of his

tender reminder that vacation is at hand, and the time near for his semi-annual visit to Willowwater is simply polite, let her re-word as she may.

She is fain to wish she might see some of her old letters, that she might catch a hint how better to deceive him.

Yes; no matter at what cost to herself, she would do that. Being a girl of honor, she would promptly bestow upon him all the olden sweetness and warmth, were it in her power.

She takes up a locket, meditatively opens it, leaves it open before her as she resumes her pen. That, she knows, was the sweet way the old letters were written. The large, critical gray eyes rest long upon this picture, but there is neither tenderness nor reverie in their gaze. That old lover's wish of Ralph's, that unseen himself he might see her looking at his picture, might not make him so happy as he has fancied.

Millicent herself grows pale over her own indifference, over her own stubbornness. Though tears rise in her eyes and drop down upon the picture, the look is still cold, the tears are simply those of remorse. But the fine rose-hued lips are set with pain; for, though she would deceive him if she could, she is obliged, for herself, to face the truth.

She closes the miniature and puts it aside. She looks at it piteously as she does so. For two years she has girlishly worn it, and placed it beneath her pillows at night; and now she remorsefully commiserates the silent thing for having fallen from such high estate of privilege and preciousness.

She cannot take up her pen the more easily for this

interlude. "It is the face of a monk, a Jesuit," she cries, as she leans back in her chair. "How could I ever not have dreaded you, Ralph Schumann? ever have cared for you? Yet I did, I did; and it must have been because I was a child, and did not know of what one should be afraid."

Gradually, however, there comes a change over her face. There is in her nature a vein of an unharmful kind of romance, as there is in all young girls of noble impulses. Millicent has her lofty ideals of personal conduct as well as her ideals of men and women, home and happiness. Indeed, do not expect any grand result of character or life from the girl who has never set up splendid, impossible standards of conduct for herself, who has never taken heightened and idealized views of her duties, who has never fancied herself enacting the brave and heroic *rôle* in imaginary events. It is this rapt, passionate dreamer who, in later life, after some mistakes perhaps, becomes the patient, steadfast woman of sterling principle.

The gray eyes under the full brow shine at last with a steady ray. With a gesture of self-disdain she re-opens the picture and again looks at it. "What a shame, when you were not here to defend yourself," she says, "and when you have trusted me too!"

She looks straight before herself into the mirror, and questions the girl there, why, indeed, a woman should not have the same feeling of honor about keeping her word as a man; why, for its sacred sake, she should not sacrifice inclination, and impulse, and dearest pleasure, as he does.

It is in this spirit of knightly integrity that she

writes a new letter to the man who holds her "word." She can write it now without the labor of composition and copy, page after page tender and earnest with the truth she truly means to keep with him.

"Poor Ralph!" she says.

CHAPTER III.

"YOURS FAITHFULLY."

"That way lies my honor — my pathway of pride.
But, mark you, if greener grass grow either side,
I shall know it, and keeping in body with you
Shall walk in my spirit with feet on the dew."

"Yours faithfully,

"MILLICENT."

WITHOUT a throb of pain, with a certain pride, instead, in the faithfulness, she is thus signing her name, when there comes a tap upon her door.

Perhaps it is some fine prevision which causes her to complete the signature before she rises.

It is Berenice, her little black maid. She holds a small silver salver in her hands. From it her mistress, with her cheek suddenly turning pink, takes a note and a great cluster of rosebuds.

"So he has come back!"

She well knows that free, flowing, careless hand. She does not open the note — but all the same, she is as far removed from the lofty ideal mood of the moment before, as a sleeper from a dream when he wakens.

She goes back to the writing-table with a slow step. She places the note, still unopened, together with the rosebuds, aside upon the marble console. She stands

a moment artistically intent upon the little pink and green reflections they make upon the shining marble; then she puts all sweetness and fragrance behind her, and goes to complete her duty. She bends over her letter. The damask tint rises, this time, to her brow, and spreads over it as she contemplates the signature —"*Yours, faithfully.*" That is something, indeed, to see just now in her own definite handwriting.

With compressed lips she reads the fair pages through. It is completely satisfactory; and she is strangely glad it is written. She tries to recall what she felt while she was writing — that it was possible to be a woman with a nature so broad and utterly honorable that her sympathy alone would suffice the man who loved her; possible to be a woman so loyal to her high ideal of daily conduct that duty well done would quite suffice herself.

This nobler, elder Millicent yet to be, gazes back at her with the sorrowful eyes of an angel sister. She turns away, and gathers up her strength. She can, she assumes, abide by certain conclusions. It is possible to live by formulas and principles. She says to herself, with cold intellectual pride, "Let one feel as one may, one can control one's actions;" and, as she despatchfully folds and seals her letter, the self-analytic girl of nineteen has a vague consciousness which comes to her aid in lack of other strength, that by and by she shall be beyond reach of notes and rosebuds, and then it will be easier.

She goes down stairs, finds Berenice, and sends her to post the letter. As she returns, her mother speaks as she passes the door — "Your note was from Jack, my dear?"

"It was, mother."

"So he is home?"

"I have not read the note yet, mother; I was busy writing to Ralph."

But now, surely, she may.

As she passes her desk she shuts down the golden cover of the picture. It is as well, perhaps. That Baconian face, with its narrow, lofty forehead, its grave and burning eyes, is truly not one to be over-tolerant of notes and rosebuds.

She sits down and reads it. It is from Jack De Riemer, old schoolfellow and friend. There is no other tie between them, can well be none indeed, since Millicent is engaged, as you know, to Ralph Schumann. The note, therefore, in substance, is not to be supposed to warrant its suggestions, even though there is such a play of rosy lights over its reader's face.

"Darling: I'm back, and will be over to-night. I send you Jennie's good-by rosebuds — what would a fellow do with all the flowers his lady friends bestow upon him, if there was not one girl, sweeter than the rest, to take them? I'm desperately tired, so try and be at home to nobody to-night but to your old JACK."

It is nearly tea time. Millicent braids afresh her pale-brown hair; throws aside her white wrapper, and puts on another white dress — a simple costly Indian muslin; and then she takes up Jennie's rosebuds. She looks at them, and her lips part with a slight, triumphant smile. Jennie — Jennie Caswell — is one of her own friends, a tall, lovely blonde; but Millicent smiles at her rosebuds to Jack De Riemer in a way

that, could Jennie see, she would hate her during the remainder of her mortal existence. Then she turns to the mirror, and adorns herself with Miss Jennie's flowers — puts one in her hair, and another in the lace at her throat, and the rest in a knot within her belt. This "girl sweeter than the rest" herself never gives away flowers to the gentlemen of her acquaintance. She holds her rosebuds, her notes, her smiles, — to say nothing of such other precious bestowments as a kiss, or a lingering hand-clasp, — in delicate reserve, such being the maternal Challis teaching, and the maidenly Challis instinct.

Going down, she finds her mother dressed and waiting. As she takes her seat behind the tall silver ice-pitcher, there is a step on the gravel without, along the veranda, and, with hat and cane in hand, a young man enters through the side door. It is Cecil Challis, the only male representative of this line of the Challises. He is two years the senior of his sister, but looks two years younger instead. He will never, evidently, be a bishop, like his father, or a statesman, like his grandfather. He has a fine smile, however, and a keen, observant eye; for the rest, his dark face is merely handsome. He is considerably more democratic in air and demeanor than the Challises in general; and if he makes his way to distinction by and by, it will probably be by some less exclusive path than those of the name usually take.

He comes round presently to his seat. Millicent starts as he passes her, and looks after him. Mrs. Challis, too, as he seats himself, becomes visibly disturbed. She interposes her fan between his face and hers. "Cecil, my son," she says, gravely. She is no

ultra fine lady; still her face pales to a more delicate clearness as she speaks. "Where have you been? You have been drinking liquors. You are unfit to come into the presence of ladies."

Cecil reddens to the roots of his hair. "Then there are ladies, and ladies, it seems. Whatever liquors I have had, I have had in ladies' presence, and taken from ladies' hands. However — "

He rises from the table. Millicent lays her hand on his arm imploringly. He lifts it lightly, without a gesture of haste or rudeness. He is fearfully angry; but that does not in the least prevent him from pausing at the door when his mother speaks. "I beg your pardon, my son; but, really — "

He waits, but she does not conclude. He bows to her without looking at her, and closes the door behind him with the touch of a zephyr. The next moment they hear him in his own room, ringing for a solitary supper.

The color comes and goes upon the sister's face. "O, mother, should we be so particular with brother?"

"My dear, who is there to be particular with brother excepting ourselves?"

"I know the theory, mother; but brother is so truly a gentleman."

"Let us preserve him such by remaining truly ladies," the mother replies, quietly. "Let us, for the sake of some other woman, my dear, keep very pure and fair his ideal of what is due a home; that is a mother's and sister's duty towards womanhood, my daughter."

Millicent theoretically knows that her mother's serene philosophy is good. She looks at her, for the

moment, as at some proposition in moral philosophy; and she admires, with a purely intellectual appreciation, the small, child-like lady who subtly and sweetly compels from her tall son and daughter the demeanor due the court of a queen. She admires this moral queenliness; and very proudly she holds her mother before herself as a model of lovely ladyhood. A tender smile shows in her eyes; it is as if after the moment of critical arms-length she suddenly folded her to her heart.

But she sighs a little over her brother. She wonders where he can have been, and resolves to speak to Jack.

"Mother," she says, "let us sit on the east veranda to-night, and have lights only in the library. Please tell Kirk we are not at home, no matter who it may be. Jack is coming over, and wants us to himself — let us have a cosy evening, mother."

Mrs. Challis readily assents to the evening on the veranda.

This veranda is the one beneath Millicent's chamber in the tower, and is the especial gathering-place of the family when they are home in the summer. It has a broad floor of black marble. At either end a fountain plays with silver drip and splash. The pillared façade is severely bare of the delicate grace of vines, even the balcony of Millicent's chamber — instead, the outlook is cold, northern, as if upon a forest. A range of evergreens is massed near, pines, and cold Norway trees, which have a darkness of shadow underneath, where the dew never dries. There are bamboo chairs within, here and there one standing on the dark turf, or within the recesses of shade.

Jack De Riemer, coming with the last ray of the sun through the western gate, does not ring at the great hall door and ask for the ladies; but, cigar in hand, saunters slowly round, and comes upon the family group — Millicent and her mother in their white dresses, rocking and chatting as if the heat and haste of the common life had never touched theirs; and Jack considers them æsthetically, as he comes up, enjoying it as he might a group of statuary. Cecil is with them, sitting within the library at the open window, reading by the last gleam of light — the Challis family courtesy not permitting of tiffs, and sullenness, and unaccustomed retirement. The traces of the obnoxious offence and of discipline undergone are alike removed. He looks up, hearing steps, just as Jack tosses his cigar off among the shrubbery. The two nod with a smile suggestive, to the lady mother, of some mutual reminiscence.

Mrs. Challis herself half rises to meet the young man. She wears a lovely smile. Her manner is redolent of grace and sweetness. Evidently this high-bred matron has subtilely held this young man with the gay black eyes under long training. His general manners have as fine a polish as those of the son of the house. There is the same fine breeding, only in the lighter, gayer man it is a bright Prince Charlie sort of courtliness.

With uncovered head he bends over the matron's white hand — a hand which he well knows is seldom bestowed thus cordially. He receives his chief welcome from her instead of from Millicent. She, if she be his "darling," as he has called her in his note this afternoon, is no less her mother's daughter; and if,

despite her prideful maidenly self, her smile and glance of greeting are perilously sweet, he receives them at respectful and un-American distance.

Seated upon the steps, at Mrs. Challis's feet, he gives her the new *Atlantic*, and offers the flower in his hand —a camellia, with waxen buds — to the daughter.

This especial camellia, a japonica, is a rare and perfect flower, as white and pure as the moonlight upon Millicent's dress and hand. "Ah, from whose conservatory may this be?" she asks in her little rapture of admiration.

But Mrs. Challis and Jack are busy over the fresh "House and Home Paper," and her brother's hand silently reaches out and touches her on the shoulder; he glances at his mother. The sister understands that there is a reason why she should not repeat her idle inquiry.

But if it is of consequence, and she will reflect, she may answer the question for herself, since she is aware that there is not a camellia in town, outside the Vandeburg conservatory and their own.

Suddenly her white fingers brush the flower from her lap. It falls by the point of her slipper, and she crushes waxen bud and peerless blossom ruthlessly, and silently looks across at Jack; and Jack, who has heard and has not answered, is duly cognizant.

She may wear dear, pure, Jennie's flowers, but to offer her anything from Cornie Vandeburg!

The angry blaze of her eyes lights up a merry sparkle in Jack's. He glances down at the disgraced flowers with stolen amusement.

After this the young lady, notwithstanding it was she who preferred the request for "a cosy evening,"

remains silent. Cecil has joined them, and she absently employs herself in contrasting the two. She cannot choose but mark the difference there is between that complex fineness of expression which culture and the active exercise of intellect bestow, and the downright good looks of nature. Her brother is really far the handsomer of the two, the easier painted or described; but, though she should not speak to him the evening long, — and she does not intend to, — she may entertain herself with the private opinions and the delicate shades of meaning the other's face will convey to her — the sensitive, merry face.

But Mrs. Challis, who has been a tender, dreaming girl in her time, has been quietly observant of all this by-play: the flower was handed across her lap; she has heard Millicent's inquiry, even if Jack did not, which she doubts; has seen Cecil's warning hand, seen the flower crushed, the flash in her daughter's eyes, and the dancing, teasing merriment in Jack's.

She lays her hand on Jack's shoulder; indeed, he is much the same to her as Cecil; has often gracefully rendered her son's duty. "Boys, where were you two calling this afternoon? I really care to know."

"O, mother, pray let us not inquire too closely concerning these young men," interrupts Millicent, with her head at its very haughtiest pose.

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Challis, we have been in no more disreputable interior than Mrs. Richard Vandeburg's parlor," Jack answers.

"Where, I hear, the gentlemen always offer you brandy, and the ladies wine: take care, Jack!"

"Mother, my mother dear," interrupts Millicent again, "we have no business with Jack and his friends.

Please let us lecture our own boy, and leave Mr. De Riemer alone."

However, the matron makes free to lecture both her own boy and the motherless, sisterless one. There is none of Millicent's frigidity and unlovely pride upon the face of the sweeter, elder lady as she considers this affair of Mrs. Richard Vandeburg's sideboard; but all the same the young men feel it would be useless to explain to her the cosy, open-hearted, democratic family; and they secretly settle the fact that many things are needful and pleasant to be done which the Challis ladies never could understand.

Millicent will have no complicity in these gentle maternal strictures. She gathers up the flounces of her Indian muslin and walks away by herself among the trees.

And so, after all, Jack thinks of her and of Cornie Vandeburg in one breath.

It is indeed a matter to gather up one's skirts and walk by one's self about.

Presently she hears a long stride behind her, and the next moment her hand is drawn through Jack's arm, and Jack's soft, irrepressible laugh floats close to her cheek. It is a tender, merry whisper of a laugh.

She quietly withdraws herself, and they both come to a stop. She stands and looks him in the face quite in the terrible Challis way. "Jack," she says, "I have idealized you; you will not bear it."

The smile still hovers around his mouth. The young man is quite used, indeed, to have this beautiful daughter of her mother make a great thing out of a trifle.

But he soon sees that this time the indignation bids fair to be unusually and unpleasantly long-enduring. He banishes his smile, and makes an effort to assuage, or at least to modify it. "Why, my dear child," he says, "surely you know the world, and that one like myself must live in it as it is."

She turns away. "*The world as it is:* Jack, I have grown to distrust your favorite little phrases. Don't, please, attempt to say anything to me to-night if you are in that sophistical mood. I hate the new social philosophies and the new kind of men; you and Cecil are spoiling yourselves. And I am the same to you as Cornie Vandeburg; do you know I would much, much prefer to be nothing at all? To think you should have no nicer instincts, Jack, than to bring me her flowers, just as you would dear Jennie's. O, Jack, you call upon Jennie, and then you can come home and go there and see Cornie Vandeburg, take wine and have her flowers — a girl that rides and drives on the fair-grounds, and has her bets on the horses, it is said, and who receives gentlemen as her friends, the ladies of whose families never call upon her! I despise her, Jack, if for nothing else, for accepting you and Cecil as friends; and to-night I am fit to despise myself that I belong in any way to either of you."

Her great gray eyes are aflame by this time, of course. The slender figure quite trembles with the vehemence of the disdain.

Jack, quite sobered, has dropped her hand, and stands looking down at her. "Well, I don't see now what it is I have done, Millicent," he says, at last.

"Well, if you do not know of yourself, I cannot teach you," she replies, coldly.

Jack really has never been so nearly angry with her. But it is not in him to long withstand her beauty and grace; above all, the grieved look that is fast stealing over her. "Millicent," he says, "I can't quarrel with you; I rather try to explain. Come and sit in the arbor with me, and let me talk to you."

"I will walk with you," she says, turning back towards the house. Busy with the care of her gossamer train, she is gracefully oblivious of the proffered arm. There is nothing left him but to fold his arms and pace along at her side, and talk at this disadvantage as he best may.

"Millicent," he begins, "of course I saw you sneer over my acceptance of the world as it is. Nevertheless, the fact remains that I have no time for expeditions either for or against windmills. The Challises honor me with their friendship, but no less I have my living to earn, my way to make. I am dependent upon the suffrages of the people, the *oi polloi*, whose existence seems to be such a personal offence to you. Next fall I shall be greatly obliged and assisted if Mr. Richard Vandeburg and the hundred men in his employ will vote for me. It would then be highly politic for me — would it not? — to refuse Mrs. Vandeburg's hospitality. Common men cannot do such things, Millicent, and live. Even as you suggested, you must not look into our outside life too closely, although Miss Cornie Vandeburg is far from being the disagreeable, ill-bred person you seem to think her. She is the usual lady, I believe, outside your world, and I have to live outside chiefly, you know. When I come over to see you, my darling, it is very much as I would sit down to read a poem or to play a strain of music, to rest and

refresh myself — *that* is a small part of a man's life, you know; you must remember, too, I could not make *you* any other part of my life if I would. *You* at the most are but the exquisite poem, the sweet song, the beautiful picture by the way, which, linger as I may, I must rise and leave."

Millicent supposes that the chief business of life, with such men as Jack, cannot be with songs, poems, and pictures; but she feels an indefinable, selfless, poignant sadness while he speaks. She has a tender, girlish fancy that these rare things have sometimes inspired a man to make his life something grand and noble. She has had her own sweet, long day-dreams of what this friendship might be to Jack. "O, Jack, Jack!" she thinks again, "I have idealized you, and you cannot bear it! What if I have idealized life, and life will not bear it!"

"Well," she says, "if it is politics that takes you there, you must go, I suppose, as to other dreadful places — your primaries and your elections. But I must ask you, for mother's sake, not to take Cecil with you; he surely is not bidding for the suffrages of Mr. Vandeburg and his hundred mill men. He must have been with you to-day, Jack, and mother would not allow him at the tea table. And please, Jack, do not bring me her flowers."

Jack smiled a little at her indescribable tones. "I won't then, Millicent. But I certainly fail *now* to understand why you should feel so about that flower. I brought it to you simply for its beauty's sake. How the fact that Miss Vandeburg gave it to me can depreciate — "

"Jack, Jack De Riemer!" Millicent cries out, hush-

ing him with a backward gesture of her hand. They are standing among the trees near the house. The library lamps flood the space with light, and he sees her weary face with its drooping eyes.

And still he cannot understand; poor, blundering Jack!

CHAPTER IV.

BY WAY OF THE CIRCLE DRIVE.

"But this one golden moment — hold it fast."

ONE at the library windows can mark the slow progress of the carriage; and an idle waiting man would find its approach unendurably leisurely, without doubt. Now it glitters along in the sunshine, now it is lost for long spaces of time among the trees.

One at the library window, or at any of the eastern outlooks of the house, can also distinguish the pair in the open carriage; since the lady's dress is a cloud of vivid rose-color, and Jack De Riemer's tall height beside her, his white coat and hat, add other vivid lines and tints to the picture.

Yes, he knows that her escort is his old pupil, Jack De Riemer, a man whose rights one may not bring into question in the Challis family — indeed, *his* are a matter more of gracious granting than of the master coming into his own. But no less the man with the monk-like face, who stands at the library windows and keeps track of the carriage, wears a look which is deadly. It is like the flash of a gun or the glancing of a dagger — is a look that some way is terrible to see upon the face of a clergyman; and it brings out still more darkly the sombre and Spanish character of his countenance. He paces the floor; and, as if aware of

an unseemly expression, passes his hand over his face again and again; but the sadness which this self-control evokes is scarcely less dark to see.

Meantime Millicent leans back dreamily, and tells Jack, "Yes, take the circle if he likes;" and so the carriage, now half way up the drive, winds off into another shadowy avenue. At this pace, the man in the library knows that it will be another long half hour before they reach the house.

Millicent is all unconscious of his presence there. She knows that to-morrow will be — well, to-morrow. But to-day is quite her own; and she smiles, and chats, and turns the pages of "Sordello," and dreams, and the waves of her rose-colored dress float down from the carriage and reveal her taking, most leisurely, pleasure in life, and sunshine, and Jack De Riemer's society.

Cecil, reading on the veranda, hears the man in the library pacing to and fro, and notes the pauses he makes at the windows. The two men have little in common, and secretly feel indebted to each other beyond ordinary gratitude for the perfect art with which each accords the other solitude and freedom from the usual social obligations.

But to-day the son of the house is conscious of a certain uneasy sense of responsibility towards their guest. He hears, down in the distant grounds, the faint sound of voices, and now and then Jack's musical laugh; and he admits to himself that it is not just the thing for one's sister to do. Certain serious reflections concerning the family friend with the jetty, silken mustache, and the gay, eloquent eyes, and the musical voice, and the unimaginable grace of manner, pass

through his mind. No, it is not just the thing for one's sister, even though one detests the man to whom the sister is promised.

After a time the carriage comes full in sight of the house again. The brother brings his chair down — he is tilted back in it against the wall — sharply. Jack has her hand; he has seen that thing once or twice before, he remembers.

But this time the man in the library is looking on; it is a picture to see — youth, and hope, and strength, beauty, grace, and sweetness, they are there, side by side, with dreaming eyes and clasped hands.

To be sure, the brother knows that there is an engagement ring upon the finger of the hand that Jack holds; that it must constantly sparkle its reminders of duty and honor under her eyes; that it must likewise suggest to Jack *his* duty and honor. But who has not known some sweet white hand thus fettered which has been false? Who has not known youth, and hope, and strength to look upon such a ring as a bauble which may be removed and replaced, with infinite advantage, too, to the precious white fingers themselves? Cecil knows what light things engagements have come to be held in the world without the Challis gates; knows pretty well the very utilitarian conceptions of moral obligations and relations which young ladies in general seem to possess; "still it may be well enough," he thinks, with a slight satirical smile. "Since a young female's well-being depends very much on the man she marries, and a young man's not at all on the woman he gets, it is evident she ought to have every facility of choice and trial allowed her, so that the final *and fatal* engagement may eventuate advan-

tageously." However, when it comes to one's sister! The half-amused, half-contemptuous smile vanishes, the flush rises to his forehead. "What can mother be thinking of!" he says.

Millicent is unconscious of it all. It is still to-day; and there has never been a time, it seems to her, quite so wholly happy as this. She gives no thought to-day to any dreary problem in ethics, nor tries at that old, wearisome, secret task of hers — to define that shadowy line where good faith ends and unfaith begins. She is sunnily radiant — almost gay. It is a day to drift along — and Millicent knows that she is drifting — is too inevitably analytic not to know it.

She means to keep promises; but promises, in the active voice, are not due. There are two long years still among books, and dreams, and friendships. This life is so beautiful, and it is so long to the end of two years! She thinks, as they wind along among the trees, that perhaps they may hold recompense for all that which is to come after them.

If Jack would only always be what he has been to-day, it could, indeed, be so. She longs, with her own touch, to give certain fine and noble lines to his character; longs, in a pure, self-forgetting dream, before she begins her own life, to make herself an influence that his will never cease to feel.

She thinks him at his best and truest to-day. She likes him thus grave, even as she has come to like Ralph Schumann most at his lightest, talking of lesser matters than life, and death, and the hearts of men and women.

To-day, to her infinite contentment, Jack has made an earnest enough matter of the Arthurian Idyls, and

has helped her through her favorite snatches of Tennyson, trace the sweet, elusive resemblance to Theocritus, their old school-day Theocritus; and he has discussed Stuart Mill and D'Israeli as philosophically as her own metaphysical Ralph; and then he has reverted to himself. He has confessed to her his abounding faith in the Present, his distrust of the Future. Millicent herself believes no man holding this philosophy can become great. He freely confesses to her his need of her influence; confesses to longings of his own for her steady faith in the old ways in which man has been wont to make his life appear to himself worth the living. If there *is* a world, *is* a life to come, then, indeed, he admits her ideal morality, the varied culture and growth which she insists upon, might be worth the endless endeavor and the austere self-denial they cost. But if not — why, then, "*dum vivimus, vivamus!*"

This graver man, she likes to think, is the true Jack, the real Jack. Of him, however sceptical, there is hope. His merry mocking mood it is useless to try to exorcise. Usually he laughs at her, teases her, lauds the Epicurean philosophy, tells her the culture she imperiously demands of one is the result of her own exceptionally scholarly tastes; the high morality, the dream of an exceptionally refined woman. He playfully calls her a sweet Madame Guyon, a modern Sister Thérèse, and tells her that her place is in the holy cells of a convent, or leading her shadowy procession of nuns, instead of in the bright, hurrying world. But on rare days like this she is simply and dearly "Millicent."

They have, during the ride, encountered Jack's

other friend, Cornie Vandeburg. She was on horseback, three other Hebes in her cavalcade. Millicent has highly approved the manner in which her cavalier has made acknowledgment of their recognitions — just the lifted hat and the deep bow, as if quite cognizant, she thinks, of the fact that a smile or a familiar glance while in her society would have been offensive beyond forgiveness. This delicate hedging in, this careful barrier against plebeian contact, with which he so gravely surrounds her, — ah, it atones! If the intimacy is not to be acknowledged in her presence she can forgive it.

As for herself — well, she is quite aware of all she is doing as she sits by Jack's side, pale, and sweet, and exquisite in her silken rose dress, and scans Miss Vandeburg from head to foot, leans forward to look at her beautiful, spirited black horse, with his rich housings, all quite as she would have looked at any other spectacle.

Miss Vandeburg undertakes an answering stare; but the bright black eyes, the brilliant face with all its masculine strength of will, cannot compass it victoriously; the younger girl, the slender, delicate, sweet Miss Challis outlooks her; and, with a scarlet cheek, a sharp cut at her horse, she bounds by.

And Jack De Riemer's brow is almost as scarlet as the angry *equestrienne's* cheek. He has not seen how "the other friend" bore it; he has seen simply Millicent. He is looking down at her now; and as she glances up she is confronted by something in his face which surprises her with quite a novel sensation.

"How could you, Millicent?" he says, gently. "It is not good, not womanly, this ugly pride towards a

lady whom Cecil and I like, and simply because we like her; it flaws you, dims you, my pearl."

For a moment the startled girl looks up to him like a child that has been suddenly taken in hand by one who has loved it too well hitherto for reproof, no matter what fault challenged punishment. But soon a sense of his presumption steals over her, and she turns away from him silent — quite Millicent Challis.

Jack smiles a little, with a wilful look of his own. Even though she be Millicent Challis, he stands not greatly in awe of her pride, after all these years. Besides, a certain sense of knightly justice is urging him to say his say. He imprisons her hands, draws her back. "Millicent, this is one of the days when it is truth between us, you know. No matter to whom you belong, you have been to me what no other girl ever will be; and I cannot bear to see you, of all others, cruel, inconsistent. I am no Prince Geraint, nor Sir Galahad; but it really does quicken a feeling of indignation in my breast when I see you, in your pride of beauty, and culture, and position, trample down another girl who is your equal, Millicent, in many qualities; one, too, who is content to admire you at a sufficient distance — one who will never dislike you, only as it is by your own bringing about."

Millicent has withdrawn her hands. But her look is again that of a chidden child. She feels, herself, that her action was unworthy, inconsistent; that her serene lady mother would have scorned it; that the unconquerable desire she experiences to trample Jack's lady friends under her feet into more or less fineness of dust, according as he holds them dear, and according as they may presume, is unworthy; but then she is not going to confess it — is she?

Jack goes on. "I am not urging you to recognize her, to seek her, you are so unlike. I do not forget that there is but one Millicent. But, please, do not insult her. I could tell you of her many kindly deeds. I could tell you of her rare good sense, her rare intelligence. She is, Millicent, fully worthy of your respect; and it has done neither Cecil nor myself any great harm to know her."

These last words are spoken as they come in view of the house. Millicent does not reply. Jack makes no apologies for his plainness of speech, — though he thinks, indeed, he is like "rough Sir Torre," if like none of Arthur's knights, — and Millicent demands none. Certain sweet words through it all make his peace with her.

They are winding up through the last long cloister of shade now. Her hand is once more within his.

"Well, sweet," he says, in a lighter tone, "I suppose this is the last drive for a while."

She looks up.

He smiles. "You know it would hardly be fair for me to be coming here now and taking your time. Ralph arrives to-morrow — doesn't he?"

Millicent assents coldly, and adds, "You will do as you like about your calls, of course; take whatever course you consider most politic."

He winces under the little feminine sting somewhat. "O," he says, "possessing your permission I *dare* come; but, on my word, Millicent, I'm sorry for the poor fellow. Were I your Ralph, Millicent, I'd tolerate no Jack De Riemers!"

Millicent turns away quickly; her maidenly pride takes fire at his presumption; her cheek burns beneath

certain of his suggestions. But the sweet words are here, too, again making traitorous peace, bidding her feel how infinitely precious and jealous *his* Millicent would be held; it is the most bitterly sweet of moments.

They are quite at the house now. Jack springs down to lift her out. He is giving her her books and flowers from the seat when her attention is called by Cecil. She looks around. With a slight gesture of his hand backward he silently indicates the library, and goes on reading.

Millicent understands. He has come *to-day*. Her brother's slight, silent gesture also subtilely disquiets her conscience. She does not look back to finish her broken sentence. She gathers up her scarf and slowly goes in.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN IN THE LIBRARY.

"Clinching his face into calm to immure
. His struggling heart till it half disappears.
If he relaxed for a moment, straightway
He would break out into passionate tears.
Is it not so?"

THERE is an emotion akin to the most deadly hatred in Millicent Challis's heart as she sweeps up across the marble floor of the veranda.

He has come *to-day*, has presumed to take an hour more than his right, a day out of her precious two years of freedom! To-morrow she should have been girded up, nerved, and prepared; but to dare lay his iron hand upon one of these rosy hours!

Mrs. Challis meets her in the hall. "Daughter, Ralph is here."

She throws herself in her mother's arms — rare procedure upon the part of this self-controlled girl. "I know it, mother; but I cannot, cannot see him! I hate him! I *will not* see him to-night — pray do not ask it of me!"

The motion, the words, have been so swift Mrs. Challis has had no power to check them; and as Millicent lifts her head, she, too, sees Ralph in the library

door. His hat is in his hand. His face is pale and drawn. He passes by them with no further notice than a bow; but as he lifts his head they both see a deeper pallor stealing visibly and slowly upward, as upon the faces of the dying. Millicent stands breathless in her mother's arms. She looks after him spellbound as he passes out. She sees him lift his hat as he passes Jack, sees him disappear among the trees. Then Mrs. Challis leads her away.

In the distant parlor she sits long with her head upon her mother's shoulder without tears or words. Mrs. Challis, too, is silent.

Finally she speaks. "Mother, it will have to come now."

"What will have to come, my daughter?"

"The end. But, mother, I never intended this. I meant to be faithful; and I think I was strong enough to have lived the life through, day by day. But of course, now — of course it cannot be explained away. Are you willing, mother, that it should be broken?"

"Daughter," Mrs. Challis says, gravely, "as I had no weighty reasons to oppose when you besought me that you might give him your promise, so I have no reasons now for permitting you to break it, only as you yourself, unhappily, have just created one — for this is a sad affair, my daughter."

"Mother, do not, I beg, deal so on the outside with me. You yourself do not like Ralph!"

"*You* chose him, daughter, if you will remember."

"O, mother, this is but cruel casuistry. I repeat, you do not like him. You did not at first."

The mother, the casuist, the dealer with the daughterly conscience, smiles into the positive gray eyes. "You did not mind it so then, Millicent."

The proud eyes fall. "Yes, mother, I am a weak girl to try to impose upon myself so," she says at last. "I will try to take my own just responsibility. I was even so weak as to think of asking you to see him for me. But I wilfully made the engagement for myself, and now I will break it for myself."

Here the tea bell rings. She rises to go, but Mrs. Challis remains seated, and detains her. "You do not take your usual wide views of a question, my daughter, in this case, it strikes me. Your promise, when you made it, included Ralph's happiness and misery as fully as it did your own; that was your argument then, if I recollect. If your logical position was correct then, half at least of your reflections upon the subject now, I should say, are due him; unless, indeed, Millicent, there is some action of his own which merits that violent expression of a violent feeling."

She turns the young princess to the light, looks full in her eyes.

Millicent stands, flushing and paling, in her mother's arms, and bears the scrutiny. "No, mother," she says, quietly, "Ralph himself has done nothing"—("I'm sorry to say," she adds, parenthetically); "but the time has come when I *know* that I do not love him. I feel a personal shrinking from him, mother. Daily contact with his will, life under his surveillance — it would be like entering the Bastile or the Inquisition. His gloom and cold intensity are terrible to me. Mother, how *could* you suffer me to engage myself at sixteen?"

But even as she asks her bitter little question, she, together with the silent lady by her side, recalls that wilful, girlish student who thought the Greek aorists and the propositions of Euclid to be the chief mysteries

and interests of human existence, and looked upon their fiery-eyed expounder as the high priest of all strength and wisdom, and gratefully and passionately placed her life within his keeping and conduct when he asked it.

She pauses with her hand upon the door. "Do you think he will remain?"

"I cannot judge."

"How terrible he looked! Was it anger, or — perhaps it will be he who breaks it, after all?"

"Perhaps."

Millicent stands thoughtful. "It would be better so."

Drift as she might, she has never thought of its coming to this. Truly she has not looked forward to any other fate than that of Ralph Schumann's wife. Let the hours of secret protest and darkness be what they have been, let the golden days and evenings coming between be what they have been, the end was always the same; and she stands there believing that she possessed strength which would not have failed her.

She goes slowly out to the tea table. But no, he is not there.

For a moment, realizing this absence in all its import, she allows herself the thought that she is free. It is no joyous feeling. She has sometimes within the last six months, just for a moment, permitted herself to think what it would be to have life before her again all sweet, dim, and unknown. But at this price —.

As she seats herself she glances at her brother; but he avoids her eye. This disquiets her afresh; and by and by, after tea, she goes out on the veranda where he is. There is a mute, deprecating air about her

which almost disarms him. He passes his arm about her. "Ah, sister," he says, "what havoc the purest and sweetest of you do not hesitate to make! What am I to say to Ralph Schumann, Millicent? I don't particularly fancy him myself; but, by Jove! sis—"

"Please, please, Cecil!" The proud, lovely head drops to his shoulder. "I am so weary of life to-night!" she moans with a sudden, dry sob.

He draws her to him. "I have no doubt of it, Pet. Sis," he adds, suddenly, in a low tone, "sis, I feel like shooting De Riemer!"

The hot crimson overspreads her face; but after a moment she speaks. "Do not make mistakes, brother. I meant to keep my promise. I could even now. And, indeed, Cecil," she finishes, "you wrong Jack."

"Yet all the same," Cecil comments bitterly. "Perhaps you better go in," he adds; "Ralph is coming."

She lingers, irresolute for a moment; then turns and steps through the window into the library.

Cecil waits for him alone. There is nothing to be said, however, but commonplaces. There is, when he comes up, no emotion whatever visible upon Ralph's face; but at Cecil's first tones he flushes. The unwonted cordiality of the brother's tones betrays far too much.

"You're late, Schumann; tea is waiting you." He turns to accompany him in.

But Ralph detains him. "I beg pardon for my absence; but even now I can't stop. I have to return to-night, and have only time to make my adieux and excuses to Mrs. Challis, if she will see me."

There is a slight rustle near them. Millicent, so exquisitely pale and lovely in her rosy dress, steps

out before them, intercepts them. "*I* will see you, Ralph!" With drooping face she reaches out her hand with grace which is not to be resisted. "Please come this way."

He takes her hand without bow or word; after a moment's hesitation, follows her. She holds the door open for him to enter, then closes it behind them. She turns up the lights, then stands silent in the centre of the room.

Finally, a grave voice says, with perfect gentleness, "You could have spared yourself this, Millicent. I already understand."

She turns to him, reaches out her hand again. "O, Ralph!" she cries.

He looks at her keenly. Her face, in her penitent distress, is almost tender — his own relaxes, a mist veils the keenness of his dark eyes. "Millicent, perhaps I have not understood! Perhaps you do not yourself understand your own heart. Are you *sure* that you hate me?"

"Hate you — no, Heaven forgive me, Ralph — no, not that! O, Ralph, I have striven — if you could only know!"

The dark eyes emit a sudden flash. He turns quite away from her. "Well, Millicent," he says soon, "I think I *do* know."

The calm, cold power in his tones is to be felt; it is indescribable.

He knows — he too? her mother, Cecil, he. She lowers her eyes, but only for a moment. She dries her tears. "If I do hate you, Ralph Schumann," she cries, "it is in moments just like this. You are like the Holy Inquisition! If you were dying yourself, you

still could rise and apply the question by torture to a delinquent! You belong in the Romish church, not ours! to the times of Torquemada, not now! For if you *do know*, as you say, you know that which should make you gentle, and tender, and patient with me! know that in my heart of hearts I meant to be faithful to you, meant to keep my promises, like an honorable lady! know that, if you wish it, I would keep them even now!"

"I do not wish it, Millicent."

She draws her head back, looks at him. The man's calm is unendurable. So the honor, the noble endurance, which she has striven to nurse and keep alive in her soul, has been wasted, wasted, utterly wasted.

"*You do not wish it!*" she says, slowly. "How very kind to relieve me so fully of all this anxiety and remorse!"

Slipping off her engagement ring, she lays it on the table near him. He stands with folded arms, and looks down at it. He glances at his watch, stands another moment, and gazes at her. There is a convulsive movement of the chin, a compression of the thin lips; his eyes darken, and the flame dies out. His face seems to the pale girl, who is torn with remorse and wounded pride, to have grown only more implacable. "It is *you* who hate *me*, Ralph!"

"*You?* O, no, it is not you!" He takes up his hat. "I have but a moment left in which to bid your mother farewell; therefore —" and turns to the door.

Millicent folds her arms, and steps forward, as if detaining him. Her face is at once bitter, frightened, pleading. She shudders before this rock against which her life was once to have beat itself out. "I know

how I waste my words on you, Ralph. I do not know why I should care to have you convinced of the truth. But I *did not* hate you; those words were but the exaggeration of the moment. And I do think that the depth of respect for you which would have enabled me to keep my promise, ought to entitle me to the privilege of parting from you as a friend." And the proud girl, so humble in her remorse that she scarce arranged her words as she meant them, held out her hand to him yet once more.

His darkened face grows white again. He has lost his iron self-control at last. His voice shakes her and himself. "My God, Millicent, what do you think I am made of? Have I never shown you any tender care, that now you cannot conceive that even in this I may be generous to you? Only, my poor darling, you cannot deceive me. It is not *my* care, *my* tenderness you desire — they have, indeed, become to you the torture and the rack. I understand it. God forgive you, Millicent, and may he shield you!"

Great tears come dropping from his eyes. He turns away hastily, does not touch her hand even now; and the next moment she is conscious that he has left the house.

Her engagement ring lies on the table. She takes it, and goes up to her room; goes up the staircase, in her girlish rosy dress, and the flowers in her hair, with the slow step of a weary woman, and feels herself weak, perjured, unworthy — *she* who has built her ideals of womanly strength, and honor, and duty as men build theirs — *she* who has stood waiting at the gate of the Future, bringing all life's costliest sacrifices in her arms!

CHAPTER VI.

A SHELTER OF SUMMER VINES.

"I built a palace wide and high;
No dusty highway ran thereby;
But guarded alleys to it led,
And shaven lawns about were spread,
Where bird and moth danced daintily.

"My palace has passed out of time;
Its sward is only sheeted snow, . . .
And I who laid it, stone by stone,
Stone after stone do take it down."

THOSE two years which once were to have closed Millicent Challis's maiden life have passed, and two more with them.

Four years of the most beautiful time in life; but they have bestowed upon Millicent scarcely one "red-letter day," and have robbed her of her mother.

She has devoted their hours to society and to seclusion, to culture and to a friendship. Both the culture and the friendship have been without definite aim or end, and Millicent's is too sincere and analytic a nature not to have found by this time that it is quite as ruinous for a woman to live on without an aim as it is for a man. For lack of some joyous, passionate, central pulse, her interest in society has not been vital, her power there unused; and her solitude has been of that kind in which one eats one's heart out. Only

in one or two directions has she become stronger or nobler.

She has grown older, but scarcely sweeter and brighter, as is woman's privilege from first to last. She knows all about ennui, lassitude, unrest, even as if she were a far older woman than she is; she is only twenty-three, just in the golden prime of the girlhood of such a woman.

But she sits here to-day wearing her pale second mourning, and feels so tired out in heart and brain, as if she had already

"Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes,"

and run through all the bliss and tragedy of a woman's heart. She is fain to decorously call the deepest feeling of her soul "a friendship," and to consider what sort of a mistakeful life it is when a girl of twenty-three habitually looks backward to the past instead of forward to the future.

What calm gray eyes those are! eyes that have that level, steadied look in them which comes from long facing of truth. They are without the droop of sadness, or the divine upward glance of hope. They tell you that Millicent Challis is perfectly aware of whatever inconsistencies there are in her character, and that she will not deny that there have been many times within these four years of liberty and leisure when she has envied the younger Millicent, who had that life of active duty and self-control before her.

She thinks of Ralph often, as a study. His farewell words haunt her with suggestions of a love and a generosity which she does not instinctively comprehend, but which fascinate her as the contemplation of an un-

known quantity in the problem of life. However, she still shrinks from the intensity of the sombre character, and turns herself, flower-like, to the sunshine. She still loves not the shadow and grandeur of the pine, but there are times when she misses its shelter and its deep, constant, monotonous voices; and she has often been made to realize that the light and graceful arbor, whither she has carried her life's work, and thought it would be sweeter to sit, is but a thing of summer vines.

She feels dissatisfied with herself, and out of place in the world, like one born too late: *her* time was in the scholarly Elizabethan era. She is aware of a certain fatal coldness in her nature, a certain absence of the broad, warm, sympathetic movement of feeling and action to which her time and its men and women are set.

She knows that her life has turned, in all these four years, in no new directions; the old channels have worn deeper and broader perhaps — in a sort of despair she trusts so. Her mother's death has made her mistress of her fortune, and of her own time and her own life to an extent which has often appalled her; and with this lonely, personal shrinking she has felt a double affection and responsibility towards Cecil, keeping close in conduct and influence to her mother's ideas. Yes, if there is any direction in which she has grown nobler and stronger, it is in the kind and the depth of influence which she exerts over her brother and Jack De Riemer. She has ceased to dream for herself, but not for them.

The relations of the three are peculiar.

Of Cecil, Jack and she often talk. Of Jack, her

brother and she seldom speak. Millicent herself is never mentioned between the two young men.

But there are times when the brother's eyes fill with a disagreeable light — a lurid light, let us say, since his are not the gleaming style of black eyes, but those, instead, which, in moments of feeling, are a winy brown — as he thinks of his friend; and it has come that there are also times when the friend himself sits moodily and dissects his friendship for Cecil's sister, and prays all the gods he be doing her no wrong. He usually ends by curling his smiling lips at his own presumptuous fears; but sometimes he does a curious bit of analyzing, and suspects certain things of himself which thrill his heart a little as he glances towards the future. He is half vexed at himself because of certain apathetic uncertainties. "This comes," he says, "of a fellow's living in the Vale of Cashmere, —

> 'For who, if the rose bloomed forever,
> So greatly would care for the rose?'

I *should* like to know her effect upon a man who had not known her all his life."

Millicent, happily, is unconscious of these secret moods of her brother and his friend. She moves on between the two, strengthening her influence over them both wherever and whenever she may. She feels a not unworthy triumph in its strength.

With instinctive wisdom she conceals whatever wrong Jack may have done her from Jack himself. In a thousand ways, did she not know him so well, she might believe herself all the world to him; as it is, she smiles a little sadly sometimes at his light use of precious words. She knows far better than he the

quality of her influence upon him. In the ordeal she has passed through, in the course of her own discipline, she has not failed to learn the limitations and the biases of his nature as well as her own. She, at least, cherishes no thought that by stress of future growth or need he will at last turn to her. She is aware that in all the higher intellectual and moral issues of life both the men place her above them, and feel her thought without understanding, as men feel the light of a star. Very sweetly and delicately she endeavors to do her reasoning and suggesting; but so often she is received with silence that she is annoyed, and wonders whether there is not a Madame Stael atmosphere about her which is fatally unfeminine.

Indeed, upon many topics they do prefer to talk with the good-humored, vivid, practical Miss Vandeburg; and that young lady does quite as much in shaping the character of the two young men as Millicent Challis. No, Millicent cannot have quite the place she covets in their lives. She is guarded tenderly by both; books which they do not read themselves they buy and bring to her; her influence restrains and purifies; but she is inevitably aristocratic, fastidious, exclusive, as the Challis women of a former generation, while they are both modern men of the world, practical, gay, and of the moment. They are refined and cultivated to a convenient degree; Cecil entertains many of the grave, punctilious Challis notions of things; but they mix with the world at large more than men of their class once did, and have acquired tastes, sympathies, and opinions which are obnoxious to the conservative girl who is their companion; and sometimes they are forced to upbraid her, as she con-

siders various of their democratic and humanitarian theories with a want of feeling.

Millicent herself is conscious of this natural "want of feeling," in their sense of the phrase. Their chiding has done her good. There are certain frank criticisms of Jack's upon her own personal demeanor to which she has paid due and deep attention. Her pride and coldness of demeanor are not so altogether insufferable.

From her own secret sorrows she has learned other and purely womanly lessons. Putting them to their noblest use, she has striven to deepen a finer sense of honor in both Jack and Cecil towards womanhood — *all* women; no longer simply towards those of her own class — the lilies.

Both directly and subtilely she has taught them, as sister and friend surely may, that there is a manner, that there are words, and looks, and tones which no man has a right to use, nor any woman the right to accept, only as they are the two who are to walk through life together. If she is prudish, and old-fashioned, and narrow, she still knows she is *right* — will be proved right a thousand sad times to the end of the world. Jack and Cecil, better than she, know that she is right. If she herself has learned this wisdom by the breaking of her heart, she at last believes that thus her brother and her friend will not break other hearts. If Jack, simply as "her friend," has all these years filled her life only to leave it empty and lonely at last, she believes Jack will beware of appearing in that character elsewhere.

It is thus and here she has grown a noble woman.

To-day, in her loneliness and her mourning dress,

she sits in her room and thinks of the last evening she and Jack spent together.

In the elections a year ago, Jack, as nominee for Assemblyman, had been defeated. In a mood of disgust he had thrown up his practice, and opened his office in an adjoining county.

It has been two months now since she has seen him; one since she has heard from him. During the last evening of his latest visit, they had talked of the future at length, and not quite as they ever had before. It was, of course, of Jack's future; of herself Millicent seldom speaks to any one.

"I miss you, Millicent, sorely," he had said to her. "There is no one to lift me from the dead level; and I begin to suspect it has been good for me to be lifted. I miss the evenings on the east veranda. O, my girl of girls, I cannot begin to tell you how I miss you!"

Millicent smiles. She lifts her white, jewelled hands deprecatingly. "O, Jack—'*girl of girls!*'" she says. "Of *her*, my dear boy, you know nothing as yet. I'm certain of it by the way you lavish upon me, as of old, all the sweet words at your command. Jack, what will you have left to say to her that *I* have not heard? We are not treating her quite well. I fear your raptures will sound second-hand even to yourself."

"Millicent upon the Use of Words," laughs he. "Seriously, I thought the other day, do you know, of publishing your letters to me entire as 'Lectures to Young Men upon the Minor Morals'?"

Millicent smiles faintly. "*Nota bene:* when you do meet the veritable 'girl of girls,' Jack, you'll not jest about her."

Jack looks in her face. "There, I've annoyed you again some way. I shall not choose my wife like you, Millicent — such a mimosa of a girl — I'm too blundering."

For a little, Millicent remains silent, considering it good for him to reflect upon that blundering proclivity of his, forgiveness not being morally good for him. At last she says, musingly, "*Your wife, Jack* — how strangely those words sound from your lips! and how strange it would be to see you with her!"

"'Twill be many a day first, Millicent. I have never, as yet, given the idea a moment's thought — on account of you, pet, I suppose. I have not known any need, having you. You have been friend, sister, mentor."

Millicent chooses to laugh lightly. "But I may be married some day myself, — you never seem to consider that contingency, Jack, — and then, I dare say, it would be like my lord and master — at least I should hope it would — to object to all this friendship, sistership, and mentorship upon which your well-being would seem to depend."

Jack had looked at her as she spoke. "No, Millicent, I think you will never marry," he had said, thoughtfully."

Millicent, unfortunately, had thought the same, and she had flashed upon him for his tone as much as for his words. "Jack, if you were not so innocent, certainly your blunders would be insufferable."

Thereupon he had blundered still farther, as was his wont with her, despite his fine polish of movement, and attitude, and gesture. "I beg your pardon, my dear Millicent. I surely, you must know, could not have meant what you are thinking."

"I do not trouble myself with your meaning," she had replied, coldly. "It is your words you should attend to."

And then she had remained frigid, and he embarrassed.

Afterwards there had been a very serious endeavor towards the old friendliness, especially when the time for parting came. But, in spite of all, Millicent feels to-day this had been the beginning of the end, the beginning of a separation.

A constraint had become visible in the letters. Then the letters themselves grew less frequent, until now time has slipped on and on, and it is a month since the last one.

This is not quite the way she has fancied it would be. She has known that eventually, of course, they must be separated, but still dear friends, she has thought; only getting farther and farther apart, like some beautiful continued story, she thinks, which one begins and reads on and on, but finally loses sight of before it is concluded, and so never knows the end.

In the beginning the letters had drawn them closer together, and they had been the engrossing interest of her secluded life. In them Lady Jane Grey, Madame Sevigné, the Sister Therese, Millicent herself had appeared, by turns, in character. Especially she could begin, "My dear boy," and lecture to her heart's content.

In comparison, his letters had been commonplace, since he could not well transfer to paper his glance, tones, and manner. But all the same his correspondent has made a treasure of them, and this moment they are locked away within the little carved sandal-wood

chest which stands on the mantel; but, locked away as they are, on account of some mystic warmth of the memory, every sentence, vivid as to the least and last stroke of the dashing pen, is before her eyes as she sits there.

"Simple, honest gentleman," she thinks, almost in her old tender, idealizing way. "Wealth and place are really the last things thought of by you, despite your avowed theories of politic conduct."

She well knows the place and power which are within the gift of the Challis connection. She smiles quite as proudly as sadly to think how simply and utterly independent of any such temptation the frank, true man has been.

As she sits there, longing to make her friendship of deeper use and deeper value, and feeling how empty her own life is, and wondering if it will be thus to the end, she sees, through the thinning foliage of the grounds, Cornie Vandeburg on her horse pacing up the street. She cannot see her face; but, if she could, she knows what a picture of bloom and cheerfulness it would be. She recalls her laugh yesterday at church in the vestibule, like a boy's whistle or a robin's song; it affects her like a bit of picture, or a delightful stanza, standing for a portion of distinct and vivid joy. With no wish to have it so, this other girl's open satisfaction in life haunts her constantly.

A few moments later she discerns Cecil sauntering up a footpath among the laburnums. She includes him in her own personal regret. Despite certain obnoxiously intense theories, he is remaining practically an aimless man, after all. She is fain to wish he had his living to make, like Jack. She feels that both he

and she are playing no grand part on the stage. She wonders what kind of activity was meant for those who are held idle by station and wealth, and then wonders again if it is the democratic ideas of those boys which have given such a bitter tincture to both her reflections and feelings.

As Cecil comes nearer, she fancies that letters are visible in the breast pocket of his coat. She wishes there might be some tidings to stir the still surface of the family life.

She goes down stairs to meet him. He is opening the sitting-room door, but, seeing her, stops. "O, here you are!"

There *is* a letter. As he hands it, he says, "From De Riemer, I see; he's hardly worth your time, I should say, sis."

But Millicent makes no reply. She runs up the stairs lightly. It is a thick letter. She promises herself an hour of the old delight, which she has thought could never come again. She makes pleasant preparation. She draws her lounging chair out upon the balcony. She rocks to and fro dreamily in her chair a moment, and then she opens it.

"Best of Friends," she reads.

"Yes, Jack, I believe I truly, truly am that," she says.

Then she settles down to the rare pleasure of this many-leaved letter. It is a long, long letter; and, after the first two moments, her face whitens slowly to the end; and then, with the long, light, loving, merry letter still in her hand, she helps herself to her feet as best she may. She goes in, locks the doors, and comes and throws herself prone upon the couch. Between

her long sobs, strangely, she thinks not of herself, not of Jack, but of one whose name is nowhere in the letter. "Ralph, Ralph!" she cries, "God has *not* forgiven me! He has *not* shielded me!"

The tea bell rings for her in vain; once, twice, the third time long and noisily in the hall. Cecil at last comes up. But behind the barrier of her door she makes the plea from which there is no appeal — the feminine headache. Evening comes, and then night. The night passes, how she does not know. She does not sleep, neither is she conscious, only of this — *Jack is coming home next week with his wife.*

CHAPTER VII.

"AS A GOOD ANGEL."

> "Bow thy head and take
> Life's rapture and life's ill,
> And wait."

IT is full day when Millicent wakes from that trance-like confusion. She lies for a few moments, with her arms thrown above her head, unable to stir hand or foot. So utterly dreary is the feeling which holds her motionless, it does not strike her as at all singular that she should be lying in her day dress upon the outside of the bed.

In a moment or so, as the light grows upon her eyes, her mind stirs feebly, her ruffled lavender mourning dress being the motor. Was it yesterday that her mother died?

For a space she lives over again that lonely funeral morning. For a strange instant she is conscious how tenderly Cecil and Jack comfort and act for her, and of the soothing, loving presences of Regina and Helen, and aunt Margaret. They all seem to her, in her utter weakness and prostration, to be in the house, near her, and her heart is that of a child. Then, suddenly, she turns her head and remembers. She sees the sheets of the letter strown upon the carpet, and she feels as if this time *it was she who had died.*

The house is not astir as yet. The smoky Indian summer morning sunshine pervades her room through the windows where the curtains are not dropped. The broad, open atmosphere of the apartment oppresses her; and she covers her eyes and feels that life, like the day, is to be full of fever, and heat, and glare. She is vaguely thankful for the utter stillness of the house and the world. She has a feeling that she needs a certain amount of time to collect herself; for, of course, daily life, with all its trifling observances, still remains to be gone through with to the end. She turns upon her pillow, feeling at war with all the arrangements of ordinary existence. She longs for the privileges of some abnormal style of life, — perhaps for the cloistral sanctuary held open, like a refuge, by the Romish religion for weary women. She understands, now, what a gradual grateful soothing and healing there may be found in seclusion from the world, and in freedom from its prescribed duties, in the saying of ceremonial words, and in the performance of ceremonial acts, since there is nothing which a woman may so come to dread as the simple, obtuse, unsympathetic sunshine, and her place at table, and the unevadable presence of a smiling face which tenderly takes note of one's sighs and silences.

As a mirage of the days rises before her, she remembers that one particular one will come upon which she will be obliged to meet *them*, and do her duty. She cannot touch her hat to her and pass on, as once Ralph passed Jack. She mutinies somewhat, and longs for the heroic Spartan ways which are permitted to men, instead of the soft, silken, masked manners of her own sex.

"*I* must 'smile, and smile, and still be a villain,'" she moans, with smileless humor. "A lady must call, and chat, and smile, and give a dinner party to her mortal enemy, and discharge a dozen other elaborate death-struggle sort of duties; while a man may pass *his* with a silent bow, and the two come and go in society unremarked."

An unpleasant light grows in her eyes as she lies there thinking. She curls her lip as she recalls how lightly Jack arranges her relations with them; and she gets quite strength enough, at last, to lean over and pick up the letter.

With slight scorn she dwells upon here and there a passage. "I have found her of whom we spoke at last, Millicent — the true 'girl of girls,'" he says. "And, do you know, I believe I am as much surprised with her as you will be! She is not like you, Millicent, —

> 'A daughter of the gods, divinely tall
> And most divinely fair.'

She is, instead, a sweet, merry, blue-eyed girl, just of a delightsome household size. She is simple and natural; rests one like any bit of nature with the dew upon it. Even to my bearded self, so fresh is she, and so natural does she make one, we seem like Aldrich's boy and girl playing at life — do you remember?

> 'She was seven and I was nine —
> Pretty people we to plan
> Life, and lay it grandly out,
> She the Woman, I the Man.'

"No, she is not your style at all; indeed, I suppose *that* must be one reason why it is all so strange and

fascinating. I expect she could read your Carlyle equally well backwards or forwards, and understand him as well one way as the other. She knows nothing of Ruskin, and thinks Emerson dreadful; turns up her pretty nose at Dr. Bartol, and the Howes, and the Radical Club; but likes Longfellow and Whittier some, and your humble servant better than either of them. As for what *I* think of all this — well, you know what Sydney Smith says, Millicent: 'When I have seen fine eyes, a beautiful complexion, grace and symmetry in women, I have generally thought them amazingly well informed and extremely philosophical.'

"She is a southern girl — name Beatrix Preston. She has heard of *you* everywhere in society here; you know how our names have been connected, dear friend. She has taken me to task about you, somewhat; but I think she understands, at last, just what you have been, and are, and always will be to me — my dearest and best friend. I fear, indeed, that I have enlarged upon your manifold perfections until she is a little shy of you, Millicent. But I do not need to ask you — do I? to love *us* as you have *me*, to be to her what you have been to *me* — our good angel.

"You *have* been my good angel, Millicent — taken me, a motherless, sisterless fellow, and kept me pure and fit to be loved by such a sweet girl as I wonder that I have won."

This was well, perhaps, on Jack's side. Millicent knows perfectly well how the letter has been written — every thought put down as fast as it came, and just as it came; all in that dreadful, innocent, blundering honesty of his, which, she is happy to say, she has never observed in his intercourse with any person save herself.

But for all Mr. Jack's sincerity, even in this her calmer mood, I fear she feels little desire to be "their good angel." Instead, she herself is quite aware of a strong impulse to crush with her own beauty and various glories Jack's blue-eyed little girl. She is, in fact, sorely tempted to give them an especially Challis dinner party, where Jack shall see his bit of nature *au naturel*, in juxtaposition with the picked people of a dozen towns, who care for nothing in life so much as for Emerson and Hegel, and can be depended upon to talk nothing but Ruskin and Turner, Wagner and Beethoven, over the nuts and oranges. It is a peculiarly ugly temptation; and this daughter of the gods, as she slips from the couch and rises to her divine height, and with cool water cleanses her reddened gray eyes from their tears, is not at all sure that she shall resist it.

"I will call upon her, and see."

Down in the hall she meets Cecil. He looks as if he, too, might have been keeping vigils. He passes his arm around her, and they go down to the breakfast room together. His manner has an added shade of tenderness, of which she is instantly perceptive. She would rather do without it. "Does he know?" she queries. And when she hands his coffee she tosses a careless inquiry, "Did you also hear from Jack?"

"No."

"Then you are ignorant of the great news; our friend was married on Tuesday."

Cecil lifts his eyes to her face. "So the man at the house told me this morning. They are in a great fever of preparation over there. The paint men, and the paper men, and all the scrubbers in town are already

on the premises, together with an army of carpenters. I believe they are going to have a bay window, and a balcony, and a tower like yours, and I don't know what more, built for Mrs. Jack within three days, with a fountain and roses, — indeed, the hanging gardens of Babylon, for aught I know."

The blood has dropped from Millicent's face while he has been speaking. She is utterly startled, and does not consider her words. "What! they are not coming here *to live* — right across the street from us — forever and ever!"

This time Cecil forbears to lift his eyes — the words are such a cry of hopeless, unendurable pain. Without looking up he sees the slight, bubbling, beating motion in the white throat, as of the life-tide ebbing.

"Yes, sis; at least so John said. And why not, since the place belongs to Jack? She has quite a fortune, they say. But now a word to you, Millicent: I'd not take her up, were I you. It strikes me, indeed, that now is the proper time to make an end of it."

Millicent does not reply. *An end of it!* For the remainder of the meal she makes a curious study of herself; and Cecil has opportunity to consider her face, with its dark circles and pallid lips.

After breakfast, being deserted, he saunters around into the grand drawing-room, whither he has tracked her. With a blind thrown open, he finds her inspecting articles of *bric-a-brac*, and descrying dust and various other reminiscences of the two years of mourning and seclusion. She looks at the carpets and the furniture with the eye of a housekeeper, and at him thoughtfully.

"A dinner party is the least we can do, I suppose," she says, carelessly, at last.

His face darkens at once. "Then you are not going to take my advice; sit down here."

"What advice?"

"*Millicent!*"

"Well." But she looks wilfully aside, quite after the manner of other maidens.

"You know what I mean. It ought not to be agreeable to your delicacy to force me into explicitness. What was it I said to you at table?"

"O, to make an end of something — of *what* you did not mention, and I neglected to inquire. I beg your pardon."

An impatient expression drops from his lips. He sits silent so long that, at last, she is forced to look around at him. She encounters a face so sad that her whole demeanor changes immediately. She drops her head to his shoulder with a sweet, caressing gesture. "Forgive me, brother; I did not mean to try you so. But pray be sensible, Cecil; you know we cannot do this thing. What would be thought of it? And it would, — yes, brother, it would be his ruin in so may directions if *we* should openly throw them over. Besides," she adds, serenely, "I don't think I wish to do it."

"It seems not," remarks Cecil, coldly. Then he adds, "Millicent, what advice would you give to another girl — one, excuse me, situated as peculiarly as yourself? According to your own theories you ought to bring this friendship to an end now. Besides, I think, as you would were it the case of another, that Mrs. De Riemer, whatever sort of woman she may be, will not be likely to quite understand it, or to

fancy it. There will be opportunity for embarrassments and misunderstandings innumerable. As for Jack, he ought to expect that certain changes will be made. He should have no longer further need of such a friendship. But, Millicent, you know all I would say; and you have every chance, now, to make whatever new beginnings you would like."

Millicent speaks quietly. "Please trust me, Cecil. Whatever changes are needful I have intended to make; only, prithee, let us shade them softly."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CHALLIS PEW.

"And myself
Would shun to break those bounds of courtesy
In which as Arthur's queen I move and rule:
So cannot speak my mind."

THEY meet where everybody in a country town meets first — at church.

The arrival was late upon Saturday. Millicent, knowing Jack's indolent habits, has scarcely expected to see them out at the morning service; but as she walks up the aisle while the organ is pealing the *Venite, exultemus*, she becomes vividly conscious that the ancient, long-vacant De Riemer pew holds occupants.

All the long hour through prayer, and lesson, and litany the two are within range of her eyes. She cannot well avoid them, and she is not for an instant unconscious of them.

Jack's head she has, æsthetically, as if it were a fragment of statuary, always considered so handsome, with its soft, jetty, clustering hair, its swelling temples, its ideal breadths. She studies its outlines anew today, and thinks them as fine as she ever did. The face itself she knows by heart; and it is exquisite torture to-day that she should know so well the mood, the phase of feeling, indicated by each change of atti-

tude, by the lifting of a hand, the stir of the graceful shoulders.

She turns with a kind of impersonal, æsthetic disgust from the small figure by his side, her artistic conceptions of propriety and harmony disturbed by the contrast in their height. *She* Jack's wife — "O, Jack, Jack!"

To be sure she cannot see her face, but she fancies she can predicate the class to which she belongs from certain outlines and movements.

Much below the medium height of women, she still is not slender, but, doubtless, has pretty shoulders and small hands — indeed, may be altogether pretty with baby prettiness, somewhat agreeable to look at while in repose; but her walk, her presence, can be neither graceful nor dignified; and how does Jack De Riemer put up with that? The artistic Millicent for a long half hour takes attentive note of every change in the attitude of the poor little stranger, and finally thinks, "I do believe it is a mere school-girl: what *could* Jack have been thinking of?"

Her hair for instance — it is lovely in itself, to be sure — a rich bronze-brown, peculiar enough in its tint and thickness to have allowed a taller woman, if sufficiently artistic, to have set up for a beauty upon its capital; but here it flows down in the simple old-fashioned curls, unfilleted, wholly regardless of the prevailing style, and without style of its own. Millicent, with some reason, distrusts simplicity. As a picture, yes; but as a woman, a member of society, what can Jack have been thinking of? She decides that she must either be some original, independent sort of being, or else an unformed, crude girl; and Millicent does not

like the girl *au naturel* as well as she may in later life.

By and by, however, the stranger turns her head slightly, and she catches a glimpse of exquisite color, of a snowy brow, and a clear pink, childish cheek swept by curling bronze-brown eyelashes.

Yes, it is exquisite so far as it goes; but that Jack, who admires culture and character, wit and style, in a woman, — his letter to the contrary notwithstanding, — should have married a baby! She has not expected a duchess, indeed, — his letter precluded that, — but a bright, graceful sylphide, with a face of the dark Southern pallor, with flashing dark eyes and a flashing smile! And this blooming school-girl — faugh!

She also permits herself to scan her dress. Her bonnet is point lace and lily buds, her dress and cloak of pale pearl moire. "Why, it's *my* style!" she exclaims to herself suddenly in surprise; for Millicent has long discarded her girlish blue and rose. Coming out of her mourning, she wears black, white, and all the shades of purple, from palest pearl to the royal Tyrian tint; they each admirably suit the moonlight fairness of her skin. She smiles at this discovery. "I'm morally certain that Master Jack has suggested or dictated in this matter, and that it is at his wish she wears it to-day. I do believe she is dressed for my eyes! Well, I can assure him he will find my things rather absurd upon that Watteau-fan girl."

But Millicent is a good church-woman, and after a time she does not fail to feel that she ought to seek to dismiss this class of thoughts. But she cannot. She knows that she is somewhat malicious as well as undevout; but she does not even open her prayer-book.

She feels no desire to join in the universal petition, "*Good Lord, deliver us.*"

Whatever gentle things she may have said to Cecil, whatever gentle things she purposes to do, certain battles remain to be fought out to the end.

It is a day, indeed, of exceeding and varied trial. It is, for one thing, no light trial for the exclusive Miss Challis to sit there in church, so perfectly aware as she is that the thoughts of the people around her must often be reverting to her to-day. She may dwell apart in her ancient mansion, as if she were a lady in a castle, but she cannot hinder the popular tongue from busying itself with her name; she is perfectly aware, indeed, that for years it has been connected with his — once it has not been so altogether terrible to know it, but to-day it is very hard to bear. She cannot hinder curious glances from her cold, pale face. She chafes with impatient, haughty annoyance under this attention of the *oi polloi* to her personal demeanor upon this occasion.

She would, however, gravely tell another girl that this disagreeable curiosity and criticism is among the inevitable penalties incurred by at least one of the parties to such a friendship; that human nature is such that she must expect this freedom of the "dirty ten thousand" with her name. She would tell her, too, that this irrepressible hate and malice towards "the other girl," this dull, gnawing pain at her heart, follow, by natural moral laws, in the wake of nearly every such friendship.

For within her own soul, which has been the home of purest longings and dreams, there is to-day nothing but pain, and humiliation, and dread, and maddening

memories. No matter what beautiful decencies she means to observe outwardly, they are all there, all this unwomanly brood. There are long moments to-day when she has no strength left to go on with this friendship, as the "party of the first part" has so bravely and lightly bidden her, even if she would.

But in the end she is fain to put one side her pride, and make concession to the public opinion she despises; fain to throw a conciliatory morsel to the prowling wolf of gossip which follows her dainty footsteps.

She does this the more willingly since, at the same time, she may discharge other immediate duties which press upon her.

After service she passes, somewhat ostentatiously, through the crowd in the vestibule, and reaches the bridal pair. She sees Jack shaking hands right and left, and introducing his wife to everybody with true democratic cordiality. His voice has its old music, his genial smile is like sunshine upon his face. He has, in good truth, no contempt for the common people, and they throng around him; it is a good scene. Millicent knows that he is sincere, feels a certain respect for him as she looks on, but all the same honestly wonders how he can do it.

In the midst of it all he looks up and sees her. She comes upon him in her tall, white, lily grace as something from a life apart. He turns at once from his old friends and their families, and with other courtesy and warmth takes her hand. His wife's gloved fingers close upon his arm; but Millicent does not scan her — not just yet. *This* moment, she scornfully feels, belongs to the public. "Why, Jack," she says with un-

usual clearness of tone, "we were not quite certain you had arrived, or you should have had our congratulations last night;" and then she turns with a dazzling smile, and an indescribable *empressement* of manner, to *her*.

Jack has almost forgotten how dazzling and regnant this Millicent is, — you are, indeed, always finer and fairer than one's remembrance of you, Millicent, — and, for his wife's sake, he is for a moment uncomfortable; and, hurried by a rush of thought and feeling, he does not present the Mrs. De Riemer quite as statelily as beseems so public a place. Instead, with an impulsive movement, he takes the little pearl-gloved fingers from his arm and places them within the other white, slender hand.

This is Millicent, Trixie," he says to her, and Millicent observes, with a slight smile, — the old girlish smile of triumph, — that he keeps his eyes upon his wife, as if he would like to see her as *she* sees her, and that half the presentation is wholly omitted.

To see her as *she* sees her — well, then, even as Miss Challis herself slowly decides, the back view has not done her justice. She is simple indeed, but it is with the simplicity of a flower, not quite a meadow flower either; the face so sweet and gay is *not* a baby face. As she lifts her lovely eyes of gay larkspur blue, with their curling lashes, to Millicent, and looks at her earnestly, and betrays her shyness and admiration, she gives her, withal, such a keen, womanly glance that the recipient thereof cannot determine whether she is a mere girl or a trained woman. Whichever she is, the full, daintily-moulded lips are quite able to syllable words with graceful ease. "It would seem," she says,

"that for me, also, you are to have no other name than Millicent — Jack is rather queer. *Shall* I call you Millicent, Miss Challis?"

"If you should prefer to, my dear madam, upon acquaintance," Millicent answers, serenely. Then she gives her congratulations, and expresses her pleasure at having a Mrs. De Riemer among them at last. "I will run over to-morrow and prove my appreciation of *neighbors*," she adds, including Jack with her nod and smile. She is moving away when she sees Cecil. She turns back and presents him, and then the two pass out.

She smiles as they turn down the rustic, shady walk. "Ah, well," she says, "she *is* lovely — in a way. I should say quite so, if Jack had not always insisted upon style, and at last gone and gathered just a sweet-pea to wear in his button-hole."

"She does strike one as rather a tendrilly little affair — that's a fact," answers Cecil. "But did I hear you vowing intimacy? She'll make a rare neighbor for *you*, my scholarly sister, I should say."

The scholarly sister, standing in the west hall a few moments after, sees them passing afar off. She curls her lip at the lover-like stroll in which they are indulging. Jack, she is duly conscious, does not once look towards the house, but is intent upon listening to the busy voice of which she herself catches a faint murmur. Upon the street, even as she had concluded, Mrs. De Riemer is an insignificant figure; and the princess-like Millicent thinks a woman should rather be anything else than that. She cannot refuse to her a certain loveliness of face; but all the same she does not neglect to classify her definitely, and with a look

as if it were well, also, to be anything else than to be a sweet-pea, a primrose, a China shepherdess, a Watteau maid. She muses, it is true, somewhat longer upon that womanly observantness which she saw in play upon the flower-like face for a moment. She does not care to admit how touched she was by that other look, half awed, half longing, which stole into the eyes uplifted to hers, as they stood, hand within hand, for a brief instant.

"The baby," she thinks, suddenly going up the stairs. "I hope Jack has not made a serious matter of it until *she* also supposes she is to put herself within my protection and friendship. I am really tempted to follow Cecil's advice."

Nevertheless, on Tuesday she informs Cecil they are to call upon the De Riemers. "A dress coat, if you please, brother," she adds.

She herself goes up stairs and arrays her in the most magnificent of all her grosgrains, — a black one, — with its train and flounces, and its sombre gleam of jet buckle and band, puts on Elizabethan ruffs, braids her hair into a coronet, and comes down stairs sweeping and imperial.

Cecil surveys her. "So *this* is a neighbor," he quietly remarks. "Poor Mrs. Jack!" He draws his mouth with a grim grimace peculiar to him. "Well, let's run over."

The De Riemer house — a pretty buff cottage *ornu* somewhat over "composite" now with its bit of a tower and its stained glass — is only so far distant as the opposite corner. Coming up the brief walk from the gate, they chance full upon the master of the house asleep on one of the bamboo lounges in the hall. At

their steps, and the ringing of the bell, he starts up, stares for a moment at the cool, pale lady standing in the door in her sweeping black, quite as if, instead of his old friend Millicent, she might be one of the stately Katherines of Arragon stepped out of history and the past.

"Ah," says he, the blood rising to his brow, and his manner growing cold. He understands *this* Millicent only too well. He shows them hastily into the state drawing-room. "Mrs. De Riemer will be down — excuse me while I bring her. We have adopted, rather largely, her lazy Southern habits," he adds, falling into a more natural tone. "A siesta in the middle of the day is quite an institution in the household already."

He goes out hurriedly, leaving the door ajar. They hear him run up the stairs, hear him in a suppressed voice speaking in the upper hall. "You here, Trixie, asleep on the floor like a kitten?" Then there is mingled laughter, — Jack's own laugh and a merrier one, — and Millicent fancies him as lifting her up.

"Now be expeditious! Millicent and her brother are down stairs — to think of their finding us both asleep!"

"O, are they both come? I will go right down."

"Sh! you forget you are in your wrapper, child! Make haste now, and hurry into something lovely."

"Why, you foolish old Jack, this is quite good enough, all ruffles and embroidery as it is, for just a neighbor. You know she said she was coming as a neighbor. State dress wouldn't be nice."

"*As a neighbor!* She's come as an empress; 'worry her,' as Bridget says. Put on that blue silk, Trixie, — the one which matches your eyes so well, — and tie back your hair with that turquoise comb."

Then they hear a confusion of footfalls, an opening and shutting of drawers and wardrobes, a most suggestive hurrying to and fro, and the lady of the solid old oaken mansion across the street leans back in her chair and smiles, and thanks Heaven that *she* doesn't live in a thin-built modern cottage *ornu*, looks at Cecil and smiles again. "Our friend Jack, as a family man, is rather absurd," she says, *sotto voce*. "Arn't they a pair? Do imagine them!"

Jack, indeed, seems unawares that he has left doors ajar.

"Put your hair up higher," they hear him say. "They wear them so now, Trixie."

"I know how they wear 'them' well enough," answers Trixie, in a vexed tone. "I wore my hair down my neck to please just you, if you remember. If you wish me to be like other people again, I'm very glad."

"Why, Trixie, what a tone!"

"I don't care; you are almost cross with me, Jack."

"Cross? Why, Baby Blue!"

The curl of Millicent's lip is ineffable. She rises and noiselessly closes the door. Cecil himself looks vastly amused with the pair of children up stairs.

At last "the children" come in. They both bear a trace of haste and heat; but Millicent finds Mrs. De Riemer so inexpressibly lovely in her blue silk, and without her bonnet, and with her hair "tied back" with the turquoise comb, that she forgives the little breathlessness in her manner, as she would forgive the imperfect petals in a rose, or the irregular shifting shapes in the clouds.

But, although she is inclined to kiss her for her very

loveliness' sake, she takes note, as she speaks, of certain provincialisms in tone and accent, and wonders if Jack does not feel *that*, since she is certain that he is listening, talk as he may, to every word his wife utters in her presence.

Mrs. De Riemer, however, seems not so vividly conscious of him. As they chat, no matter to whom she speaks, she invariably, with the close of her sentence, turns her blue eyes again upon Millicent; it is very much as if she were resolved to see just what this haughty Miss Challis, this wonderful Millicent, is.

Poor Trixie! as she looks and listens, she, too, is fain to query with others why Jack did *not* marry her, or, rather, did not wish to. The only reason there can be, she sagely concludes, is that the dear, lazy boy likes his comfort too well. "One must needs keep 'geared up' with her," she thinks. "Let him protest as he will, he enjoys my slipshod Southern ways. *She* would have kept him and herself in grand toilet these hot days, sitting in state in here in readiness for calls."

But the while she draws these happy conclusions, her guest is learning from her that she has lived on an inland plantation in Louisiana until sent North at the beginning of the war; that her father was killed in the Confederate army; that her mother died in the Southern hospitals as nurse; that their estate was abandoned; that it has been but lately restored to her; and also that Jack has been her attorney in the affair.

Of course the entire history of the acquaintance is in Millicent's possession now. "And how do you like the North, madam?" she asks.

"I haven't liked it at all," the little madam answers.

"But, then, I have been poor, and with poor people. My one relative North, my mother's cousin, was a mechanic, as it happened. Their house was small and uncomfortable for one of my habits. I had no new clothes for a year, and so did not go out much, as you may think. Of course," she adds, meeting Jack's embarrassed eyes, "it was not the fault of the North, but I disliked the North for it all the same. But here it will be different. The verandas, and the carriage, and the good servants, and the plenty of money, make it not unlike the South, only I miss my black people to be good to, now that I have money again What *do* you do when you like to make little benefactions, Miss Challis?" She does not prefer, as yet, to address her as Millicent. "Have you any genuine poor people here — dependants, I mean? the laboring people here seem to me so very, very proud. I have never known quite how to demean myself among them."

The little madam with her wild-rose cheeks is very much in earnest about this. Miss Challis, however, is somewhat disconcerted, especially as Jack and Cecil both turn upon her their merry quizzical glances, quite as of old.

"I have supposed the needy were plentiful enough everywhere," she replies, at last. "If you have a fancy for playing the Lady Bountiful among us, our rector will be happy to advise you — I usually make him the channel of my charities. I suppose you cannot, as yet, have visited your wife's estate," she remarks, turning to Jack. His reply she does not hear, however, since she is listening to Mrs. De Riemer's suggestion to Cecil.

"We shall see you, Miss Vandeburg tells me, at the reception she gives us to-morrow night."

Cecil thinks so, greatly to his sister's disgust.

"I thought *you* must dance when I saw you at church," the little lady goes on with naive emphasis. "I really feel reason to regret that your sister does not care for it — Miss Vandeburg told me. I'm passionately fond of it for myself, and the Northern music is so especially good, and your nights are so fresh and breezy, with no bayou miasma at all — just the climate for a junketing sort of life, picnicking and boating, horseback and sleigh-bells — I can scarcely wait for the ice and my skates; that delightful and kind Miss Vandeburg waked me up yesterday to all my privileges;" and she tosses her curls back, and her lips part, and there is a quick upward breath about her as if she were about to break out into a merry tra-la.

But she seems snddenly to remember herself. She looks around quickly, with eyes like a bird's, but her husband and Millicent are engaged over a portfolio of prints in the back parlor. So she goes on, and finds that her dark, handsome neighbor dances and skates, picnics and rows, sings, and finds life upon occasion much the same that she does. "Am I not likely to meet your sister *anywhere?*" she asks at last, in a low tone.

Cecil smiles. "At our own house often, allow me to hope."

"Yes, I can think," she says. "I can look at her and think. She would spoil a common entertainment. Mere people occupy half the world; she by herself the rest. 'Everybody was there,' they must say of places where she goes, 'everybody, and Millicent Challis.' I know, I have felt it already. Indeed, I think I should like her best at home. Her friendship would be some-

thing one would hold quite apart from the other business of life."

Cecil is much amused at the novel mixture of airiness and insight, merriment and reflection, which their little neighbor seems to be, and he queries, in the same breath in which he assures her that he generally assists at the Vandeburg gayeties, whether Jack has not purposely taken Millicent out of range of the bird-like tongue of his Southern oriole.

Presently the two return. Millicent takes gracious leave of the little bride, who shyly keeps her hand a moment when she gets it, unaware, perhaps, that the lady likes not intimacies.

Millicent is not ready for one here, most certainly; but she feels it would be like shaking off a baby's fingers, and so, instead, she suddenly stoops and kisses the white brow.

CHAPTER IX.

AGNES.

"If our Lancelot, that most noble knight,
Were for one hour less noble than himself,
Pray for him that he scape the doom of fire."

THESE are the dark, chill, silent days in Millicent's life wherein she makes no growth. These are times when even to herself she scarcely seems herself. Some mocking spirit seems to have taken her into his keeping and guidance; for whatever she may conclude to do, she is apparently fated to pursue the course opposite.

She maintains inexplicable relations with her neighbors at the little cottage *ornee*. Outwardly she lives her life as if indifferent to their near presence, tenders them none of the terrible hospitalities she has meditated. Statelily they have repaid her state call; and once, in all good faith, Mrs. De Riemer has essayed the customs of neighborliness, according to Millicent's own serene suggestions — has tripped across the street and up through the grounds to an ivied open side-door of the mansion, in her garden hat, without gloves, and with a bit of sewing sociably visible in her apron pocket.

Millicent is sitting up stairs in the tower balcony. In her lap lies her Greek Theocritus. She has taken

it down from a corner of her book-shelves, vaguely determining to begin something once more in the shape of study, and so delight herself a little in the old ways. This especial copy of Theocritus is an old school book; so long forgotten that she has caught her breath and turned away her face as she opened it. It is full of pressed flowers, bits of verse, pencil-marks — tokens of a fairy, blissful era, as far removed from her, in point of time, as those blue Sicilian summer days when the ancient bard wrote his "honey-flowing pastoral hexameters."

She and Jack De Riemer have read these sweet idyls in merry company; and, as she idly turns the leaves, there slips out a forgotten photograph of the school-boy — slender, beardless, enthusiastic.

Ah, what days those were! What a life it was! — that outdoor student life, which they fancied was like that in the garden-schools of Plato. The expeditions, and rambles, and talks which lasted through so many years, — they all come thronging back from the past. What a deep charm there was about Mother Nature as they dipped into her mysterious "ologies"! What a charm about rock, and shell, and stone, bird, and flower, and star! What a happy way to live it was! — the two young heads bent low over a rose, and talking in eager confusion, while, with careful fingers, they rifle it of its pink leaves. "Peduncle and calyx sub-hispid," says Jack. "Yes," says the girl in the gaiter-length dresses, with her hair in drooping braids; "and the sepals are subpinnatifid, elongated, and appendiculate — also fragrance *extremely* sweet," she adds, dipping her white nose into the golden heart of the flower, and bringing it up yellow with the pollen of

the stamens; and then she ends by dreamily eating the polypetalous corolla, while Jack picks a bud and a spray of leaves from the bush, and fastens them in her braids.

Back, back in the past, with its cool, murmurous breezes and voices, it is somewhat startling to suddenly look down and see Mrs. Jack coming up the footpath among the trees, her hat swinging on her arm, her curling hair black in the shade, gold-dusted in the sunshine. She has a sunny, dreaming, peaceful look upon her face; and for a moment the student-girl is possessed by a bitter rage — feels that that look was her own rightful possession, and rifled from her by some subtle robbery.

She instantly divines the younger girl's friendly, chatty intent. She rises in arms. She almost hates the poor little kitten as she goes down stairs to meet her. She sweeps her one of her society courtesies, takes her from the sitting-room, and through the grand, fragrant, flower-decked hall, into the great darkened drawing-room, remarks and replies in stately phrase, until the warm-hearted little humming-bird, cruelly conscious of her garden hat and her roll of hemming, is fain to retreat. She goes home feeling that she has violated the whole dreadful social code, and, subtlely aware of her husband's irritation in regard to mistakes she may make with their queenly neighbor, keeps her exploit to herself.

But she makes, of course, a womanly effort to avenge herself. She returns Miss Challis's next call by driving up the grand drive to the great door, and sending her servant with her card. Millicent, from her perch in the tower, is duly observant. She laughs,

drops her book, and then runs down and out in bright haste to the carriage side. For the space of three minutes she makes herself so agreeable that the stately little madam is completely fascinated. She puts off her calls, allows the carriage to be sent over home, and herself is carried in and detained to an informal *tête-à-tête* tea.

There are music and singing, the rose-colored cockatoos, and the white parrot that can talk Latin, and the new Japanese flowers in the conservatory, and the rocking-chairs in the east veranda. They are for the first time simply two girls together. Millicent, with easy art, brings everything quite to the level of her guest. Her innocent, gleeful enjoyment of the house and its rare quaint pleasures disarms her; she gives herself up to the task of entertaining her, and finds a certain enjoyment in observing her.

She sits patiently, looks at her and smiles, while with eager hand the pretty Mistress De Riemer tumbles over the portfolios of old music, giving the while a little childish scream at each ancient polka, waltz, or ballad which proves to be a reminiscence of the old piano in her Southern home.

Millicent plays them for her — redowa, galop, waltz, cachuca in tireless succession, while the child, behind her, breathlessly tries the steps of each. She is thus flying and tripping down the room in some startling Polish dance as Cecil enters. She only nods merrily and keeps on — her prescence at church concerning him having proved delightfully correct. He looks at his sister and smiles. His eyes dance with amusement as he stands and watches her; and finally, as she whirls by him with half-closed eyes, humming the

strain herself, he springs into step; and when Millicent looks around, attracted by the heavier cadence of footfall, she sees them both whirling down the hall outside.

Her fingers still flying over the keys, she looks back and watches them. "She really is nothing but a child — more of one than Jack thought. To hate her is an absurdity!" she thinks, as the tinkling laugh mingles with the music, and she breaks from Cecil's arms, and, swiftly eluding him here and there with the grace of a Moorish girl, she comes flying to her side.

An abundant satisfaction is visible in her eyes as she stands there. "What a happy little creature you are to-night!" Millicent says to her.

A blush suffuses the bright rich face. Presently, with a sweet seriousness, she looks around into Millicent's eyes, and says, in a slow, quiet whisper, "You have liked me to-night, and I could be myself — that is the reason, Miss Challis."

"Have I not always liked you?" Millicent asks. The serene intellectualist has a pure intellectual fancy to know how well this child can read the graver people around her, when she asks this question. She is scarcely prepared for the earnest heart-to-heart matter which "this child" makes of making the answer.

"No, Miss Challis, I do not think you have. And it has worried me — partly because it worries Jack, I suppose. Do you know he even blames me a little? He says I have somehow missed my way with you, and that I have made you, by my trifling demeanor, a very different Millicent from what *he* ever knew. He gave me a feeling, before I ever saw you, that someway

you were to be my fate; so, failing to win your friendship, Miss Challis, as he expected of me, it is to me somehow as if there was a great failure on my part already. I could wish Jack had not made me feel so."

Millicent wishes a wish, too, as well as the wife — that she had asked no such personal question.

She puts her arm lightly around her. "Your husband must be simply teasing you, my dear — he is a sad tease when he likes — and you must not mind. And as for me, you shall have all of my friendship that you can make use of."

The girl leans against her with a little nestling movement, but does not look at her. "I do not mean to mind," she says; seriously. "If I did not like you so much myself, Miss Challis, I might have felt it a great way for Jack to act. But, do you know, I *myself* wish so many things when I see you that I cannot blame him — that I was a scholar; that I could comport myself with dignity; that I could live here by your side year by year, and be as a younger sister with you, and grow like you; and I have so often wondered if other girls feel like this when they see you — if you make them stop and think when they see you — "

"There's adoration for you, I'm sure! Who talks about a woman's friendship for a woman!" cries a voice behind them.

It is Jack. They both turn towards him; Mrs. De Riemer with heightening color, Millicent slowly — it not being pleasant to see him in this new light. He looks somewhat annoyed, in spite of his gay tones, and furtively scans Millicent's face.

"You looked when I came in," he says to his wife, "strangely like some little Catholic at confession.

But whatever secret sins you have, your choice of confessor is good bond for your ultimate safety."

Mrs. De Riemer laughs. "There, there!" she says. "What did I tell you, Miss Challis? He really does keep a rosary of your perfections and daily counts his beads for my edification." She turns to Cecil more gayly still. "And am I not specially nice-tempered to not detest the lady, the patron saint?"

In the midst of the merry badinage which follows, in which there is now and then a sharp thrust, but never one from the little oriole-tongue itself, Millicent remains silent — it is not her custom indeed to assist those who go on personal word-tilts in her presence. But all the same she thinks that Jack must show very bad taste indeed at his own fireside; is not at all grateful to have had this glimpse of life at the cottage *ornee;* makes no wonder that his lovely child-wife should seem not so very deeply in love with him. So it was one of the thousand infatuations, after all! She sighs again in behalf of the wife. "Poor child, it was not her time to love!"

In fact, Millicent is greatly troubled with the result of her purely metaphysical question. She is uncomfortable beneath the burden of her pitying consciousness concerning the sweet child-madam — that she is in reality but a child; that she should not have been wedded and placed in the wife's grave place in life; that there should have been for her a long girlhood, room for growth and for varied friendships, room for

> "many a hope and aim,
> Duties . . . and little cares."

She scans her face as she saunters off among the pictures with Cecil. There is no trace of any deep

feeling whatever. She is not jealous, is not pained, is not piqued. It is with no personal vanity, but with a noble, redeeming gladness that at last she thinks, "*She* admires me far more than her husband does—the sweet innocent child! How glad I am!"

She makes some endeavor, judicially prompted thereto, to understand and extenuate Jack's conduct. She herself has not failed to note that his bearing has lost its old buoyancy; she has been impatient of certain expressions visible upon his face at times; she has noted small irritations of manner at such times as his wife has talked at length — as if, indeed, the fascination which had consisted in the unlikeness to her Madame De Staelesque self had proved of very brief duration. She regrets that rounded periods and learned allusions should, after all, be a need of his daily life — she cannot understand it quite, since, for her own self, she is rather agreeably entertained by the child's humming-bird dippings and skimmings among life's graver matters.

And then she falls into curious reflections as to how nearly a butterfly should be expected to fill a man's heart. She wonders if the fluttering wings, fanning so lightly with every zephyr, ever have stirred the still depths she knows of. She ends by concluding that a man who weds with a butterfly, and avows his great joy in the gilded wings and the airy flights, as Jack did, has no right to complain if there should prove to be unoccupied spaces in his heart — heights and depths to which the gilded wings are unequal.

Indeed, as she sits there, she feels a silent rage growing in her heart towards Jack for both his fickleness and his folly. And as she glances towards the

pretty face, so lit with pleasure, so innocent of any dark emotion, a tender thought, half motherly, half sisterly, thrills through the nature of the elder girl like the whirr of an angel's wing.

"Millicent!" says a low voice at her ear. She knows that Jack is sitting near her, in his old seat at the end of the piano; but her name from him in this intense tone startles her.

"Millicent, your face is as eloquent as ever. You think I have gone and married *a la* David Copperfield; and so, shame be to me! I have."

And-at the same moment the same thought strikes both. "Yes, there is 'Dora' *in propria persona!* And Agnes?"

Simultaneously they turn from each other.

The thought may come as a curse to Jack; but to the softened Millicent it comes as a blessing, with its revelation of a nobler womanliness, with its slender clew to her duty.

The next moment, with the gravest face she has ever seen him wear, Jack turns gently back towards her. "What shall I do with my mistake, Agnes?"

It is a long time before he seems to perceive her silence. But finally he looks up into a face where the shock of pain, and a strange crimson, is but just dying out. The great gray eyes confront him reproachfully. "You can, I trust, avoid committing worse ones, Jack," she says, as she rises.

He catches at her hand. "I know, I know; forgive me, Millicent, for *her* sake, if not my own. Ah. this is dreadful."

Millicent hesitates. But still she thinks she knows this loyal, blundering, outspoken Jack. His words

never yet have concealed darker meanings beneath their surface. And for *her* sake — there was no false ring to that little cry! For "*her sake*," then, she will forgive him; and for his own she will speak words which it were well that men should oftener hear from lips like hers, even in the first sweet hour of danger.

As she resumes her chair by his side, he lifts his face from his hands. He gives her a sad smile of thanks.

"For *her* sake," she says, "I remit your offence so far as it concerns me. And yet, Jack, I must say to you that I do it under protest. I like not a woman to compound such felony as this. Still, for myself, I do forgive you. But your sin against your wife, Jack — and your greatest sin is against her, not me — I, as her sister and her champion, will *not* forgive. O, Jack! am I to teach you your duty to your wife? This is the first falseness, in word or deed, that I ever knew of you! O, Jack!"

He has looked at her keenly at first; but at last he bows his head before her colorless, smileless words. The husband of Beatrix Preston is fain to consider, for a moment, the evident fact that he can no longer call the sweet flush to the cheek of Millicent Challis, nor the warm tremulousness to her voice. He is stricken by it with strange pain.

Cecil and Mrs. De Riemer are nearly round the parlors by this time, on their tour among the pictures and the *faience*. As the two stand before a rare bit of majolica, Jack's eyes dwell upon the merry Clytie face. He turns away as if he had never cared for the shell-like tinting of her cheek, or the beauty of her eyes.

"I pity her more than I do myself, after all. Be *her* friend at least, Millicent."

"Yours, too, Jack, unless it is your own fault." Then she adds, gently, "Jack, *your* 'Dora' is not the 'Dora' of Dickens's pages — the deeps, and mysteries, and the sleeping powers of the live, growing, changing human soul are added. I have studied this pretty wife of yours, somewhat, Jack. Strong impulses and intuitions are astir in the warm, young heart. You err, I think, in treating her as a plaything, or even as a child. Be careful, Jack; do not make mistakes you can never repair!"

He smiles bitterly. "I dare say I am a selfish dog to tell you, Millicent, but she really is but a plaything, but a child. I must have been mad! She amuses me, it is true; she is even dear to me — but what a two months these here in our own house have been! She dwarfs me, Millicent, dwarfs life — home, and life, and the future are all upon the toy plan. Her vista is simply down an endless bazaar. What it is to be shut up with her! Even you despise us! There, forgive me; I will say no more. You need not fear but I shall outwardly be true to her. I *am* true to her as far as she goes. But for the rest — you *shall* hear it, Millicent — for the rest I am true to the best and the highest I can see! Millicent, you yourself used to teach me that!" he adds, even while he cowers before her look.

This time Millicent rises quickly. She speaks in a cold, suppressed tone, which is all the more terrible because it *is* suppressed lest another than Jack hear and be hurt.

"Jack, is *this* the real Jack De Riemer? I taught

you no such sophistry! You wilfully lead yourself astray! I despise you for making such subtle and ignoble use of my innocent words. But if, indeed, *my* words are so much to you, hear them! There is nothing in life higher than plain duty, nothing nobler than sound honor. To-night you forswear one and flaw the other!"

She suddenly leaves the room; escapes for a moment into the silent moonlit evening, longing to be alone with something that is not of earth. There she wrings her hands and covers her face. It is the climax of all the varied, wretched pain this innocent friendship has cost her! In her soul she loathes the coward that can swear to protect the girl that has put faith in him, and still come and spread her faultiness open before the eyes of another woman. She knows it is no momentary error of intellectual judgment — the central moral principle of the man is, after all her dream of knightliness, but a reed.

Through the open doors she hears him proposing to return home, and she rejoins them. Mrs. De Riemer glances merrily at her, then at her husband. "Look at the pair!" she cries to Cecil. "I suppose they've been on one of their old strolls up Olympus, or Parnassus — which is it? My dear children, is the rarefied air of those places always conducive of rueful visages? If that's the look you'd wear, Jack, if *I* could discuss Shakespeare and Compté with you, I shall make no efforts further to reach those 'happy seats above the thunder,' which you and Miss Challis frequent. Miss Challis, you were lovelier this afternoon teaching me that point-lace stitch!"

A faint smile touches Millicent's lips. "Was I?

Thank you. Come over to-morrow, my dear, and I'll show you that *point d'aiguille* bar."

"That Miss Challis is a perfect nun about lace-work, I was aware," Jack says, lightly, "but I didn't know it was one of *your* tastes, too — you'll be famous gossips, I foresee." And with that Millicent rallies; and the two, who, instead of strolling over Olympus, have just crossed swords upon one of life's deadliest battle-grounds, chat lightly over the smiling child-madam as the one wraps her shawl about her, and the other buttons her gloves.

Both brother and sister accompany them to the door. They linger a moment; and Cecil promises to drive her out to the city upon a shopping excursion on the morrow, since her husband cannot go. Jack expresses due thanks for this attention, and the good-nights are said.

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE.

"This is my sorrow day and night,
The secret of my troubled song,
'My life is wrong! My life is wrong;
What shall I do to make it right?'"

MILLICENT stands a moment beside Cecil, looking after their guests. So long as she can see them down the winding avenue, Jack seems to her to tower tall, dark, and silent; his little wife trips by his side, her blue dress and mantle brightening into silvery azure as they cross the open moonlit spaces. She can hear her clear, merry, continuous voice even after they are out of sight.

"What a grave old Spanishy Don De Riemer's growing!" remarks Cecil. "That pretty bird of his might as well chirp her delightful little nothings to a post. But what ailed you and him to-night, Millicent? I thought I observed a special commotion over your way at one time."

He puts the question in a light tone; but he looks around at her from under dark brows. Millicent is not there to make answer, to his surprise; and presently he hears her door closing up stairs.

"Well, that's cool. A fellow might as well have a Lady Abbess for sister as this girl of mine of late. Poor Millicent! What would she say, I wonder, could

she see the little girl-madam and Cornie Vandeburg together!" He smiles, thereupon, at various reminiscences; lights a cigar, goes out, and throws himself down upon one of the long seats under the moonlit oaks.

From her place by the window in her tower Millicent sees him — his white coat and the red spark of his cigar revealing him — lying there motionless. She is strangely irritated. "Poor brother!" she thinks, in the midst of her bitter personal reflections. "Without an aim, without any trials, any perplexities, even, without one single responsibility, — what a strange sensation it would be to look out upon existence with your eyes! What a strange experience it would be to see what is passing in your mind the hours when you sit like this!"

Doubtless, Millicent, it would be! And long after, she goes back to these hours, and looks out upon existence with Cecil's eyes.

She has had, these many months, only a negative patience with this dear, high-born idler. She thinks his life, as a life, to be only little better than an opium-eater's dream. These long, waking, motionless siestas of his have grown to oppress her with a nameless horror. She would be thankful for simply a book in his hand; it might serve to dissipate that appearance of beclouding Oriental reverie which visibly envelops him. She wonders what quality in his soul, or what combination of qualities, it is which evolves this moral hasheesh under whose influence he passes the days away, day upon day.

"My noble father! my true, sweet mother! what unworthy children we are — he so useless, I so petty, so weak, so wicked, if weakness and wickedness can indeed go together!"

With this thought a blush stains the lovely pearl-white cheek.

This hour by herself is, indeed, a terrible hour. To the pure girl it is as shame that she has any secret to hide away in her heart of hearts; it is as shame to remember that she has thrilled from head to foot with all that bittersweet lingering music of his low voice when Beatrix Preston's husband called her "*Agnes.*"

It was only for a moment; and in that moment even his eye had not rested upon her; but again and again, alone in her own room, the pure girl puts up her hand with a quick gesture, as if to hide herself from the humbling memory. Her eyelids droop, her attitude is of one who sits in self-abasement beneath a load of guilt and shame. Strong words — *guilt* and *shame.* But Millicent Challis understands the meaning of words tolerably; and she asks herself what others would her conscience accept from her to-night.

For vows have been broken, a man's honor flawed, one woman's trust trampled under foot, another's insulted, and — ah, yes! she *knows* she shared that moment of passionate pain and sweetness with him to the full! Her conscience holds her face to face with *that* like her mother's arm, like her mother's voice — that sweet, and pure, and wise mother of hers!

This is enough, Heaven knows! but it is not all. For sin as subtlely as she may, Millicent has subtle power of following self up the track.

She puts her chief sin, the sin which has caused all the rest, in plain words before herself. It is, perhaps, a common enough social sin with women of her power; but who says it shall go unpunished? She knows that she, by her air, and glance, and smile, by her wilful

daily demeanor, has belittled the young girl in society and in her husband's eyes, until he, too, is ready to criticise, neglect, belittle, and torture her. Millicent well remembers that this was once her deliberate intention — she is frightened to-night to see how faithfully she has carried it out, and at the results. Yes, like many another woman with many another man, she has held Jack's home in her hands — she knows it fully, certainly; but it is no sweet consciousness. She is frightened.

She thinks of the pretty child-madam with remorseful tenderness. She *knows* that if, *like* "Agnes," she had risen a noble and generous woman, and taken the girl at once into her friendship and care, as Jack, with blind, intuitive wisdom had implored her, that had she striven with the easy art at her command, to show him the other and deeper side of his wife's nature, Jack, with his light nature, would still have honored and admired his wife, and all that which now is would never have been. This thought is to be the Ixion's wheel upon which through all the future she is to be bound.

She goes over it all again and again. She admits how deadly her hatred of the poor little "Dora" has been. She thinks of the detestable Catherine of France, as she remembers the temptations which have passed dimly to and fro beneath the surface of her own soul; and she feels what frightful possibilities lie in the gentlest human breast. No, not in the "gentlest," perhaps! She has no right to speak so sweepingly. No one, not even the thoughtless Jack, not even her blessed mother, has ever called her "gentle Millicent." But she has prided herself upon her

purity, her exquisite, refined womanhood; and, still, what has she not done? What might not an enemy justly lay to her charge? The bitter tide of consciousness swells again. Broken faith with the man who held her troth-plight, given heart's love unsought, hated an innocent girl with full-grown hatred, repulsed and tortured her, and herself listened to love from recreant lips, and thrilled in the hearing!

One might well keep a rosary of her manifold perfections, and tell over her virtues admonishingly to some sweet credulous child!

Ah, what a maze of mistake, of wasted aspiration and feeling, the years seem to her to-night! The End, seemingly, has come; but it has not set her free. The old interests and bonds still involve her, only it is no longer openly. It is as if some spell had been uttered, as of Merlin's charm, made

"With woven paces and waving arms,"

which had the power to hold her out of the happy sunshine forevermore.

Strong and pure as she is, she may well shudder to find herself midway in one of those dark labyrinths which no woman's feet may safely tread. She feels how bitterly she should judge and condemn any other such Millicent — yes, even after this. She knows the scant measure of charity she has dealt to whatever woman has stood in this perilous place between husband and wife.

"But *I* am pure, *I* am loyal — when was the fatal mistake made?" she asks herself, weakly, and trembles because she *knows* when and where. One woman may not sin towards another, as she towards Jack's wife, and escape scath.

She is, indeed, within the labyrinth. There is but one point where a ray of light falls. It is when she sees herself stand holding "Dora's" hands in her own and vowing true sister's service henceforth. Here, she feels, is the only spot where she may safely take a step forward.

She drops her head to her hand in utter weariness. She longs for her mother. She feels so weak, so girlish, so unequal to the burdens of independent womanhood, and all those varied and delicate duties which she dimly begins to distinguish as belonging to the position she holds, and the influence she wields! She longs, like a child, for her mother's counsel, for her mother's protecting presence in the house.

"Sweet Florence Percy!" she thinks. "The dreadful critics may sneer at your little song; but singing it, you have sung it for thousands more of women. I wonder if it was in an hour of struggle and weariness like mine you wrote it:—

> 'I have grown weary of dust and decay,
> Weary of flinging my soul's wealth away,
> Weary of sowing for others to reap —
> Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep!
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'Over my heart, in the days that have flown,
> No love like mother-love ever has shone.
> No other worship abides and endures,
> Faithful, unselfish, and patient, like yours.'

"No, it is the song of one who has known struggle and weariness, but not shame and defeat: hearts like mine are quite past such an innocent outburst as that!"

She rises from utter weariness, and paces her chamber, and remembers other vigils kept therein; and feels so old and worn with the experiences of life. She

is haunted by a feeling that whatever little else of tragedy there remains to the drama — of that also she shall be compelled to learn her part, and play it to the end; and the strong, Christian maiden trembles with all a Greek's dread of Fate.

As she crosses the floor, she drops, as with utter weariness, before the little marble table upon which her prayer-book rests, with its covers of velvet and ivory, its golden clasps, its glittering cross and monogram, its gilded leaves. Like a true aristocrat she worships duly and punctiliously, with pomp and circumstance; like a good churchwoman she reads here her petitions, morning and evening, and with varied effect — since, at times, the prayers of the church have been to her mere word and form, and at other seasons eloquent for her, both in gladness and in grief.

She slowly turns the leaves to the old sacred collects — the prayers which have availed her gentle lady-mother in all the events and issues of life. Her own lips tremble with the last words that fluttered from the precious dying lips as they whitened : —

"Spare us, spare us, Lord Most Holy."

It has grown an hour of extremity, even the next unto death, with the daughter. It is a long hour. The ancient, holy prayers fall, one by one, monotonously from her dry lips; but there seems no cry of help strong enough. Her breath comes faintly. She leans her damp forehead upon the table with a bitter cry — "*Miserere mei, Deus!*" She feels that face to face she must come into the Father's presence, or perish.

"O, Jesus, Son of God!" she suddenly sobs," *Thou* wast tempted, *Thou* wast tried — O, remember me!" For the rest the great tears fall, drop by drop.

It is a long orison. She rises too weak to wonder whether the angels will come and minister to her. She is faint, body and soul. It is longer, alas! than forty days and nights since she has stood in this deadly peril.

But as she rises she feels that in the helpless moment of letting go her own strength so utterly, she did touch the Rock — that mystical Rock to which millions and millions of earth's tempted children have clung. She is too weak yet to know anything more than that there were strength and comfort there. She goes back to her seat by the window faint and white. It is her first actual knowledge of the Heavenly Help; and she trembles as she thinks, "In *His* strength I might go on, perchance."

She leans back in her chair by the moonlit window, too troubled yet to think of sleep. Cecil has gone in. The night is utterly silent. Tree and turf are bathed with a silver glory. Leaf, and leaflet, and shrub, and blade are minutely distinct and gilded, until it is as if what she thought but simple little grass at noon was really fairyland with all its glittering spires.

There is not a breath of breeze, a rustle of leaf. It is so utterly still that Millicent starts nervously as she fancies that she hears the little footpath gate at the western corner of the grounds. Indeed, she does hear the clink distinctly now, as the latch springs. She looks at her watch. It is half past one. She thinks the servants are all in the house. Still, it may be the new gardener — she is not certain of his habits.

She waits somewhat nervously. However, she sees nothing, hears no more. But, nevertheless, every nerve remains strangely tense and vibrant. The sound

has struck upon that electric chain of prescience or instinct with which we all "are darkly bound." She smiles at herself at last, and thinks it is not a good hour to be up and awake; but still she sits there, a prey to a mood which she never has known before.

Suddenly she rouses with a violent start. She feels that she must have fallen asleep leaning against the casement. She has not heard a footstep, or the slightest rustle; but there, emerging from the winding avenue upon the opened silvered lawn in front of the house, she sees a figure all in white. It is approaching, hesitantly, stealthily — but certainly it is approaching. She discerns it to be a woman, the next moment, in a white dress, with something white wrapped about her head and shoulders. Breathlessly she watches her. She is quite near now — has paused. She seems to be looking along the rows of windows in the wings. Then she comes back again before the narrow, projecting tower.

Millicent has herself noiselessly stepped out upon the balcony. Yes, the woman is really there — she stands looking up with clasped hands, quite as if it were all in a picture. She is full in the moonlight; it falls upon her face, glances upon one tiny bare foot set in the wet grass, and Millicent sees her face plainly.

She does not wait longer. She darts noiselessly back — *it is Mrs. De Reimer* — runs down the stairs and unlocks the door.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE DEAD OF THE NIGHT.

"All at the mid of the night there arose
A quarrel 'twixt husband and wife;
For the young Omer Bey and his spouse
Falling into discussion and strife,
Wild words to each other they said
Side by side at the dead
Of the night on their marriage-bed."

BUT when Millicent gets the door open there is no one to be seen. She crosses the veranda, then goes out upon the lawn.

"Trixie!" she calls softly, as she looks about anxiously.

Even as she speaks the white figure comes around swiftly, from the deep shadow in the angle formed by the wing and the tower. It *is* Trixie. The two hurry towards each other. "Mrs. De Riemer! — what is the matter? What can be the meaning of anything like this! Is any one ill?"

For she sees, to her greater alarm, that the child is in a flowing wrapper, her curls unbound, her feet bare. Her cheek is as white as her dress; and she is trembling with a violence which parts her lips and gives a strange, shuddering look to her eyes.

She has caught at Millicent's hands, and holds them tight; but she seems unable to speak — her teeth chat-

ter with each attempt, and stop her. But at last she does manage to say, shaking between each pause, "It *is* you. I wanted just you. I was not certain which was your room. I feared to ring, lest I should see some one else. O, I was *so* frightened when I heard the door!"

She stops because she shakes so she cannot go on. She has not given the reason for her strange appearance here; but evidently no one is ill. Millicent is sorely perplexed, freshly alarmed. She waits a moment for the child to recover herself; then says, "Now, what is it, Trixie? You frighten me terribly."

Her arm is around her, and Trixie turns and lays her head against her shoulder. "Would you take me up to your room?"

Millicent hurries in and up the stairs. As she closes the door of the chamber behind them, her strange visitor drops down upon the nearest sofa. But she shows no inclination to speak. Millicent sits down and takes her hand. "Now, my dear?"

The child turns her head away. "Let me wait and rest a few moments — please."

Millicent, troubled as she is, can but comply. And while she accords rest, and time, and silence to her, she asks of herself where Jack can be, that his wife should be abroad in this plight. As she looks down at her, the unmoving lids, the stirless lashes, those open immovable eyes, give her a shudder. She marks how heavily she breathes, heavily and slowly, like one in some stupor of both nerve and muscle.

Sitting there thus, this exclusive Millicent Challis feels that in despite of all her exquisite ideals of womanliness, she knows but very little how to bestow

sympathy, even when she feels it, or how to win confidence.

"Mrs. De Riemer," she says at last, — it is with a gentle movement, as if to suggest the necessity of self-control, — "is not this something I ought at once to know? You are in trouble — where is your husband? Surely he will be alarmed at your absence!"

Since Miss Challis seems to wish it, the heavy head lifts itself from her shoulder. She answers each question in its order.

"Yes," she says, "since I have come to you, you ought to know. Yes, I am in trouble. I do not know where my husband is. Were he at home he would not mind my absence."

Millicent herself has a time of shaking and trembling now. She begins to fear that Jack *has* gone farther with the evening's recklessness. "Pray, speak more definitely, my dear! You merely alarm me with what you do say. You may depend upon my sympathy and assistance." And she winds her arm more closely around her.

The first sob shakes the little figure now; and with it the color comes back to her cheek. She turns and looks at Millicent with misty eyes. "I do not think you have liked me, Miss Challis. But I believed you would at least advise me, and perhaps take care of me; and I *could not* stay there alone — it was so dreadful, so sudden! I thought, too, you could help me to understand. *I* do not understand him — he said I did not, and I do not. I do not understand people with depths — he said I did not, and I do not. I did not know that he had them, — he was so light, and always alike in his ways, — or I never should have married him — *indeed* I should not!"

This, too, is annoyingly indefinite; but it is sufficiently terrible to Millicent. She dare not trust farther to what she may delicately gather. She fears — she knows not what she may not fear, since the child does not know what her husband is.

"But," she says with Trixie's own simple directness, "you know I *do* like you. You have not forgotten what I said to you at the piano — at least *I* have not, my dear. You must try now to tell me where your husband is gone."

This, it appears, is the way to deal with her — she will, like a child, answer direct questions.

"He *said* to Albany. But I think he may have gone anywhere." She raises her eyes to Millicent's face. "Did he tell *you* of any journey?"

A faint, warm pink suffuses Millicent's forehead. The little question is put so significantly, although without any sharp, feminine emphasis, that she feels her own miserable position with Jack is fully understood by his wife.

She replies very gently, however, "No, my dear girl, he did not. But then, I am not very much in your husband's confidence. Still, the journey is nothing strange — is it? he is often absent; his business requiring it."

"Yes, but I have always known before, Miss Challis, and assisted. This time he packed his valise himself, and came into our room with it, and with his hat, and his duster on his arm, and then stood there and quarrelled with me — yes, he did, so shamefully!"

"Quarrelled with you, my child!"

"Yes. And about you, Miss Challis. It was so very cruel, I think," she adds sharply. Indeed, she

rapidly loses her self-control now. "*I* am not to blame that there is such a person as you! I am not to blame because I am not like you! I did not pretend that I was. I told him, at first, that I had not read the usual books; that culture and all such wall-flower sort of talk was not my style. And he thanked his stars, he told me, that it was not — if I had a taste for pictures, and music, and general society, and him, it was enough, he said. He told me he did not think the intellectual woman was the highest type. O, I cannot begin to tell you, Miss Challis, the false things which he said to me! Besides, he represented himself to be just like me, which is so very different from what he is. For all his most light manner he is grave and rather bitter, and a thousand years older than I am. I know what *I* am very well, Miss Challis — a waltz, and a song, and a smile, and a kiss, and a merry *tête-à-tête — that* comprises me; and I have found that with a man these things are but the dainty refreshments of the passing moment, the *bon-bonnerie* of his grave life. And so — O, my God!" This is a sharp cry; and the child tosses up her hands in an agony that contrasts strangely with her simple confession of the lightness of her nature.

"But you surely have not said these things to each other, my child? If such things exist, they are felt and lived over — not spoken of and confessed!"

Trixie is utterly quiet again, save for the tears running down her face. She shakes her head. "I have said nothing to him that was wrong. It was he. But you shall judge. When we left you to-night, and he was all smiles, to me as well as to you and Cecil, he did not speak all the way home. But for the last month it has often been so. I know what you mean by 'living

over.' *I* thought it would be the right way with two who *must* stay together; and I have tried to do it. So I chattered on in the merry way which used to entertain and rest him, he said. He used to say, to be like a bird or a flower was to be womanly — to please and to amuse was better than to understand or to instruct. Suddenly he stopped me, and looked down at me perfectly pale. 'Trixie,' he said, 'how trivial you are! Are you never going to learn the dignity of your position? Society does not regard us as children!'

"I was dumb. He went on, growing more vexed every moment. 'I should suppose you would compare yourself with Miss Challis! Trixie, I have to propose that we do not so often appear in her society — the contrast is more than *I*, at least, can bear!' Do *you* not think *that* was cruel? *I* thought it was. I was not to blame for your existence. Heaven knows that *now* I myself would be learned and queenly if I could." She looks up into Millicent's shocked, pained face here. "When we got to the door, I tried to speak to him. I said, 'I am only myself, Jack — but am I not your darling as ever?'

"'*You are my mistake!*' he growled. Yes, Miss Challis, it was quite as much a growl as it was a groan. I could not say a word, after such dreadful sounds addressed to me. He opened the door, and when I was in he shut it again with himself on the outside. It was not long before I heard him come in; but when he came up stairs he went into his own room. When he came into ours, it was as I told you — he was ready for a journey. 'Trixie,' he said, 'I am summoned to Albany upon that Truesdell case, and I cannot say when I shall be back. Here is the bank-book — get

money when you need.' But I do not believe he went to Albany. I did not then, and I do not now. I had up the servants. They said no despatches had been sent to the house, and I know he had not been down to the office. I couldn't speak to him, and he kissed me, and hurried off.

"When I could move I tried to follow him — what for I don't know now. But I was so weak I could get no farther than the gate. I stood there and heard the train come in and go out. I was in my bare feet and my wrapper, and so I went back up to my room. Ever since I have felt so —" and here the poor simple little voice begins to quiver again — "I have felt so abused, so hurt, so sick, so weak — *it is all the same as if Jack had beaten me, Miss Challis.*

"I could not well stay there alone. I was afraid to feel so lonely; and I thought of you, and though I did not know how I ever should get let in and really reach you, and the way was so long to come alone in the night, up through those thick trees, I got out of bed and came. I felt as if I must come to you, even though you are the one that he —"

"Hush, hush! do you not know that this is an insult, Mrs. De Riemer?"

But the sad blue eyes persist in their earnest gaze. "You quite mistake me," she says, quietly. "I only meant to show you what you are to me, and how perfectly I trust you. You seem strong and wise — so much stronger and wiser than either Jack or I. We are, indeed, but boy and girl playing at life, as he used to take so much pleasure in saying; tossing its mysteries to and fro as children toss their balls, stringing its sweetnesses into idle lengths, just as I used to

string honeysuckles upon slender golden straws, try the necklace on, wear it through the hour of play, then toss it aside to wither. O, Miss Challis, do you see, do you see what mischief and ruin we two children have wrought with life? And we are both so young and must live so long! What shall we do?"

Millicent does not answer at once. She sits there comprehending the case in all its bearings. The great drops come out upon her girlish forehead. Mischief, ruin — yes! She feels a most bitter mixture of indignation and contempt towards Jack. She recoils, personally, from this touch of brutality, ruffianism, in him. Was it *his* tones that thrilled her heart so little while ago? Never in her life has she known a sensation so sickening as the self-disgust she feels at this moment. She also feels, I fear, less charity than ever for her erring sisters; for she coldly wonders how woman so lightly forgives falseness towards woman. Such forgiveness is not in her pure and profound nature. That this sin should have been for *her* sake, and in *her* name, only serves to deepen her horror.

She is, withal, somewhat surprised at the intensity of the aversion which she feels towards the recreant husband. She does not quite understand herself, finding herself thus differing from the traditional woman of the novelist, who forgives all manner of perjury if so be it be for her own sweet sake. "Perhaps," she thinks, with a curl of her lip, "it is because I am the intellectual type of woman."

As imperfectly, too, does she understand the woman by her side — the other type.

For, all the tenderness, the forgiveness, the depth of sorrow which she herself cannot feel, she demands

of poor little Trixie, misses it in her. In fact the child, with her shallows and her deeps, is a puzzle to her. But she shrinks from probing the heart of the wife. She trusts it is not one of her duties.

What her own duty is, with the influence she knows that she wields over both husband and wife, the pure girl, the shrinking maiden, does faithfully try to consider. She prays that she may make no mistake, as she takes the poor "Dora's" hand in hers and starts along the perilous labyrinth. She prays that the Heavenly Help may not fail her.

She looks down at her, lying silent against her shoulder, patiently waiting for her to be "wise" for them. She is surprised to see that she has fallen asleep in the midst of it all. How lovely she looks again! Cheek, lip, brow, neck, and ear are infantine in their curve and tinting. How *could* he leave such a baby alone in such a black haunted forest as the world is to such as he makes her!

She wakens her gently. "Trixie," she says, "the first thing, as I presume you know, is to preserve appearances. Your household must not waken to-morrow morning to find itself deserted by both mistress and master. I will go over and stay with you, and we will cheer up. I dare say your husband's words were very great exaggerations of his real feelings and sentiments — intolerable to you all the same, of course. Indeed, men are inexplicable beings, I suppose. To-morrow you will probably receive a letter sufficiently penitent; and in due time he will return."

She brings stockings and slippers for the bare feet, wraps her in a shawl, arrays herself, and the two go down stairs.

As they reach the veranda, and Millicent pauses to turn the key, Cecil, hat in hand, steps from the library window. His face is over dark and grave in the gathering shadow of the moonset.

"You are right, sister. And I trust Mrs. De Riemer will allow me to see you both safe to her door."

Trixie glances from the open library windows, as she steps down upon the grass, upward to the open windows of Millicent's chamber. They are directly in line. He could have heard every word. She flushes and pales alternately.

Millicent looks down into her troubled face with a sisterly smile; and as Cecil draws the child's hand through his arm she gives her knightly brother a grateful glance. She places herself on Trixie's other hand; and thus comforted and championed, the poor little child-madam goes back to her desecrated home.

CHAPTER XII.

"LATE, LATE! SO LATE!"

> "Heaven love thee, whom I loved long!
> Thou hast lost the key of my heart's door —
> Lost it ever and forever,
> Ay, forevermore."

"AND the last mail is in, too!" Mrs. De Riemer gives Millicent a look which means many things. She has come over at dark to wait for Cecil, who has gone down town in her service, to remain until the last mail train is in. And Millicent has made the restless child so sure of a letter that when her brother returns and gives her the magazines, and, with a silent inclination of his head and an eloquent gesture of his hand towards their guest, passes into the house, she feels, for a moment, as if it were she instead of Jack who had failed her.

She puts her arm around the silent little figure. "I thought he would," she says, simply, but making the words full of tender comfort. The cold Millicent is fast learning womanly ways.

She has been over at the cottage *ornee* nearly all day. What a novel "study" the child's heart has been to her! Millicent has seldom been a "confidante," an intimate. Outside of books she knows little of the womanly heart, except as her own may be a type. She knows men's hearts somewhat better.

It has not been altogether a pleasure to make this "study" — sympathy in this case not being so painless as the merely intellectual comprehension and appreciation usual to Millicent Challis in her contact with her fellow-beings.

What a mixture of innocent vanities, of wakening womanliness, of sweet credulities, of acute perceptions, she has found the pretty Southerner. Millicent's lip, ready to curl, wreathes into a tender smile. She is, she has finally decided, a pretty creature of intuitions and impulses, without views, opinions, or standards, or a girl's glorious dreams; motherless, sisterless, untrained, ready with passionate admiration for whatever seems to her beautiful, pure, and strong, but dazzled with her own glimpses of truth; puzzled, confused, pained, and frightened over the mystery of her own life as it comes in contact with the mysteries of another's life; above all else, frightened sorely that pain, and hate, and fear, and sorrow should grow out of love.

All day long to-day the child has talked incessantly. She has constantly essayed to analyze, to understand her husband. She has, as constantly, appealed to her, his life-long friend, for explanation and verdict, leaning upon her words, yet studying them, turning them, arguing over them, until, to-night, the mere student of books is weary, puzzled, disheartened.

So, if you yourself do not understand the younger girl, cannot fathom her feelings at her desertion, nor tell whether she has ever really loved her husband, nor whether it is pride, or anger, or a childish terror at her grave position in the world, or heart-break that actuates her now, neither can Millicent, who is with her, and can study her as you cannot.

But the yearning, half motherly, half sisterly, to protect the little stranger grows upon her. She thanks God for it, and takes it as his gift. This evening, as she goes home again with her, as she realizes that he has *not* written, she thinks of Jack with less hope, and with cold dislike. His trivial, boyish, unworthy demeanor in this, life's most serious relation, is fatal. It inspires in her a womanly contempt for him which is akin to absolute pain.

For what a light love! What an ephemeral, unworthy love! She has her own secret, cold, passionless indignation against him, that this passing attraction could lead him into life's most solemn places, whence man nor woman may get back into the flowery fields with the treasures they carried out; while, ah, what had he not thrown aside all through the years! *She* knows.

But still she longs to save him. "O, Jack, even *now* if you were true! There was happiness here by your own fireside if you had been worthy!" If she herself has been wicked, it was none the less his personal duty to be pure and true, and she honestly wonders that Jack, with his intensely modern appreciation of the light, graceful, and effective in literature, picture, and music, should not have been fascinated anew as he had opportunity to study this child-woman with the striking variety of her nature, the iridescent shallows, the deeps that hold moon, stars, and the heavens in their mysterious bosom — she herself is not able to think of her with indifference.

She decides again that it must be a momentary madness. She thinks he *must* return, *will* write. Thus she comforts Trixie, and with tender touch tries

to prepare the mysterious child-heart to forgive him, and to go on with life nobly and heroically.

At last there does come a letter. But it is not for Trixie, although it is from Jack. It is for Millicent herself. Cecil waits until they are alone before he gives it to her. His face is dark and stormy. "Sister," he says, "it is evident that De Riemer is a scoundrel. Rather than you should read this, I crave your permission to personally return it to him."

Millicent understands. "Brother," she says, quietly, "these are not the days of the duello, but of common sense. Let us both be simply and wholly loyal to Mrs. De Riemer. Let us think only of her. Let us take measures of safety, not of punishment."

She takes the letter and goes up to her room. She waits a while before she reads it, as once before — over his last letter, indeed. It is, as then, a thick letter; as usual, he must have written his heart down at length.

With cold cheek and eye she sits and forces herself to read the long pages through. It is a record of the man's madness and mistake; and all the while she reads, the little maid of ancient Almesbury sings in her ear, but brings no tear in her cold eyes, nor any sigh from her heart, —

> "Late, late, so late! and dark the night and chill!
> Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
> Too late, too late! ye cannot enter now."

The old, sweet names, only half sincere of old, names that she had trembled and thrilled at, even while she divined how lightly they were uttered, are lavished upon her here in passionate cries — at last. Late, late, so late! That passionate heart's love which, in

her girlish dreams, she had fancied the purest and loveliest, as winning from the strongest and truest, she reads of now, page upon page, at last — late, late, too late! The fine rose-hued lips never once relax their haughty curves, until, as she finally drops the letter to the floor, an expression of horror crosses her face. She brushes the envelope from her lap as some loathly thing.

"Madman!" she exclaims. "He would, he really *would* utterly desert her — avows it, and still expects another woman to trust him. He *must* be mad!"

It is a most bitter hour for Millicent Challis, bitterer than any that have gone before, bitterer than any, saving one, that is ever to come to her. But she rises at last and goes to her writing-desk. "I *must*, for her sake. As for him, I do not know how much a woman may properly do to save such as he."

Indeed, Millicent recoils at her exceeding hardness towards the man who has so ruthlessly outraged her self-respect, together with all the tender ideals of her life. For the sake of the olden, merry, noble, chivalrous Jack, she tries for a long hour to soften her condemnations.

She takes up her pen at last and writes rapidly.

"Jack, Jack, are you mad! Come home at once, since it is still within your power; for I have saved all scandal as yet. Even Trixie herself believes in your return. I have faithfully tried to extract the sting from your brutal words — yes, Jack, even you yourself must know that they were brutal, ruffianly. What do you suppose is my personal humiliation, that one could have uttered them who claims to have learned chivalry and courtesy from *me?* You bind my colors upon your helmet only to lower them to the mire.

"You speak of love: Jack, in behalf of all womankind, let me beg you to distrust a love which inspires in you cruelty and villany, which makes of yourself a coward, of your wife an unprotected, deserted creature, of your old friends enemies, and of me, if you persist, a stranger.

"However, I beg you to come home. Unless you wait too long you will find forgiveness, will find your wife, your home, your reputation safe. But I am only a girl, and this is not girl's work. I cannot long buckler such a cause, or long fight a battle of whose issues you — "

Millicent leans back faint and pale as she drops her pen. Could the good faith of woman to woman demand that she pass through this ordeal? To what sacrifices of personal delicacy is she bound by the knowledge that her influence over the two is so nearly without limit? for, while the letter seems to her at one and the same time to be too gentle and too cold and harsh, she appears to herself as a participant in the sin and the shame.

After a bitter while she takes up her pen again.

"O, blunderer, how you throw away the treasures you have gathered coming up life's heights! — your friend, — for I was your faithful friend, Jack, — your old standards of manly conduct, your place in the world's respect, your right, so nearly established, to a laurel or two, and, with it all, this rare girl whom you have won. In regard to her, how blind you have been! She is to me a poem, a picture, a fascinating mystery. In rarer, worthier keeping she might become all that the poets paint a woman, since she seems to be one of the few who have been 'dipped in angel instincts.'

"O, you poor, blind Jack, what else shall I say to you, only to *come home?* I will not attempt to point out how or when you should come; you understand the proprieties of life sufficiently. Self-control, I know, must still be within your reach; self-respect you must expect to earn slowly."

She has sought in these later sentences to be tender, to be womanly-kind, but she finds the necessity laid upon her to be womanly-true paramount. At last, in the struggle between mercy and justice, she lays her head down upon the desk and sobs, "O, my poor, ruined Jack!"

But to the letter itself she cannot, cannot add a tenderer word, though she writes still a sentence more.

"With this, Jack, I must notify you that I cannot receive letters from you. I shall look for further tidings only in the changes which may take place in your household. Indeed, a letter to your wife to-morrow will be the only worthy and honorable reply you can possibly make to me."

Then she signs her name, seals her letter, picks up Jack's and burns it, attires herself for the street, goes down into the library, where she knows Cecil is. She lays the blank, sealed letter before him. "If you please, I should like this directed to Jack."

"Sister! Upon my soul, Millicent, what am I to think?"

But, though Millicent's cheek flushes at his tones, she does not treat him to the usual wilfulness. She stands for a moment looking straight before her, as if pondering some sudden idea.

"Cecil," she says, at last, in a gentle voice, "perhaps I *am* doing wrong. I doubt myself if a lady may

participate at all in such a correspondence independently. Cecil, you shall be father, mother, and brother to me."

With a quick movement she tears the letter open, places it in his hand, and, kneeling on the rug by his side, she lays her head upon his shoulder.

But now Cecil lays the letter down. "Forgive me, dear; I can trust you, of course. Still I hate him the same; think *how*, when I know that he has blighted your life!"

Millicent trembles a little on his arm; she makes only a true denial. "No, brother, that is all long past; only the early leaves; *they* never matter, you know. And, indeed, I *wish* you to read the letter," she adds. "I think it will take from me that feeling of clandestineness which was so unsupportable. His I have burned, or you should also read that."

He draws her close as he reads, and she notes the flame as it spreads over his cheek. It is a long time before he speaks. "You ought not to hold one still, sister, even for *her* sake — the villain! I make no wonder you burned his letter, Millicent; I can read it plainly enough between the lines of yours. He is not worth the effort you are making."

"*She* is, brother."

After a still longer silence, he draws to the table, envelopes and directs it. He rises and reaches his hat. "I will take it down. It is quite enough for you, sister, should the storm burst, to have appeared as *her* friend. A woman's white hands spot so easily with these things."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BRIDGE OF COMMONPLACE.

"VAL. Last night she enjoined me to write some lines to one she loves.
SPEED. And have you?
VAL. I have.
SPEED. Are they not lamely writ?
VAL. No, boy, but as well as I can do them."

THE stronger nature bridges over for the lighter one, best as she may, the silent days that follow.

With studious care she fills the time with drives, and strolls, and music; she reads aloud enticing pages from a score of books, which, forthwith, the child borrows and lugs home, and sits up to read by the midnight lamp; being, by the lucid Millicent, once put in possession of the thought which is the master-key to the volume, she shows, to Millicent's surprise, the facility of an expert in unlocking the hidden stores, be the author poet, or philosopher, or whatsoever. The older girl grows encouraged with her pupil, and opens for her here and there some mystery of nature which she herself has hitherto enjoyed in that calm, unsocial silence of hers. She alights from the carriage on the road-side, steps down to the marshes, and brings back just a bit of moss, and sedge, and bracken, and a pitcher-plant, picks a spray of leaves from the maple

tree that she passes under, gathers a few pebbles, and, as they drive slowly homeward in the warm, vaporous Indian summer sunshine, she teaches the younger girl various ways of enjoying solitude.

Trixie delightedly tells Cecil about this "Challis Course of Lectures." She says it is as if Millicent had touched some secret microscopic lens in her eyes, until a leaf or a flower, as she holds it up to the light, stands out in such vivid multitudinous detail that nature seems over-valuable with her story of family, and tribe, and relation, and analogy, while just men and women grow but a pygmy part of God's creation; she is glad to turn from them and rest herself in this other harmless, happy life around her; and, with the other books, she is fain to borrow all Millicent's various "Botanies" and "Geologies," her microscope, and hammers, and specimens, and go out wondering and discovering by herself.

Cecil does not, much to his sister's relief, extend his dislike of the husband to the wife. He assists Millicent with sympathy and suggestion, rouses himself from his lazy life of reverie, and is very much indeed at the service of herself and their winsome little neighbor. For, to both brother and sister, she *is* winsome. Millicent daily confesses to finding entertainment and a certain sort of wisdom in her rainbowy, cascady talk, and in her sudden, lingering, contemplative kind of laugh, which may be a strange sort of laugh, but which, most certainly, is Trixie's.

To-night the two girls are sitting upon the east veranda. They are passing through the nightly ordeal, which is to wait for Cecil's return from his stroll down to the post office. Silence has fallen be-

tween them as his protracted absence denotes that, as usual, there is no letter; and Millicent sits and looks at the girl, and discerns that, perhaps, she has not cheered and amused her so altogether successfully as she has sometimes half-wonderingly, half-contemptuously believed. Just now it is evident upon her face that the child has lived her own intense woman's life these days, after all. The rich, bright face looks faded. The rounded cheek begins to reveal a faint sinking-in, a touching thinness. There are shadows under the larkspur blue eyes, and there is something pathetic about them as they seem to search the rosy sunset sky.

Suddenly she leans her head back against her chair and looks around at Millicent.

"Would you like to know, Miss Challis, what I have been thinking? Perhaps it is not a veritable thought — you are, I believe, succeeding in teaching me to discriminate between thoughts and fancies. Yet, even as a fancy with all its impossibilities, it has brought me a feeling of peace and rest. It is in the shape of a great wish, Miss Challis, — *that I was not married.* No, don't look at me so, since it is not the vulgar discontent; but it is something I have often felt since I have been so much alone with you — that I ought not to have been married until after I had known you. I should like to be just a girl again, and to be a friend of yours, and to have life all before me as girls do. Do *you* not think, Miss Challis, that two girls, if they were like you, looking at all the greater things of life in your earnest and serious way, could be a help to each other? *I* can imagine such a beautiful friendship. There is so much in the world *besides* marriage, so

much that should come before; a girl should have time to grow brave, and thoughtful, and wise, and grand in so many ways. She needs to be so wise and noble *before* she is married, I think.

"If *I* had had," she goes on, "*then*, perhaps, had Jack loved me, it would have been with the other side of his nature. Miss Challis, the love which is like Queen Guinevere's in the Idyl, which loves but 'warmth and color,' is beneath acceptance even by me, even if I am only a baby, birdling, butterfly, as I once thought it very sweet to be called by him. O, Miss Challis," she adds, with the glimmer of a smile, as if conscious of her absurdity, "could you not have made something of me had you always had me with you? I cannot bear to think that I need be what I am!"

"One can really begin life anew at any moment if one will," Millicent makes answer. She recalls, as she speaks, at least one of those fresh starting-points in her own. "I have come to believe, indeed, that one cannot fervently long to be what one can never become. Forfeited Edens may be guarded with flaming swords and terrible angels, but Heaven never was. The upward path is free, if not the backward one, Trixie."

Trixie ponders these words a moment, since she invariably ponders what Millicent may say. "I understand you, I think," she replies at last, "but it is not what I meant. Do you know —" She pauses.

"Do I know what?"

"Well, you will laugh at me, Miss Challis, but I have the strangest feeling that, impossible as it is, it will all be so yet."

"What will be so, my dear Trixie?"

"This impossible living my life over, and, Miss Challis, living it with you."

They smile in each other's faces at this, and then Trixie, heaving a little sigh, goes on.

"It is absurd, of course; indeed, I am quite accustomed to such absurdities. This, however, is the very sweetest of them all; and, as such a daydream is not likely to harm me, I shall e'en go on and live my sweet, beautiful double-life; I think I can see how it might even be good for me, how I might grow wise and better in it, as if it were really actual."

It is growing late. Cecil does not return, and Trixie at last thinks that she will go.

"There is nothing, of course, or he would have hastened back. So say the little charm, Miss Challis, and I will be gone; say it now like some tender mother — 'There certainly will be one, Trixie, to-morrow, if not to-day.' See, I know it by heart, Miss Challis."

She laughs; her tones are light, but Millicent sees that the blue eyes are full of tears. She repeats tenderly to her the words which really have become a good-night formula between them.

"Yes, Trixie, there certainly will be one to-morrow, if not to-day. I believe it still."

She sits and watches her passing slowly down the avenue. She sees her reach up and break off a spray of maple leaves, sees her stop, like a little coquette, and take off her hat and fasten them in, — a flaming aigrette against the black feather, — then hold it out and look at it. She sees her pause again in the distance, and lean against a tree, and look up at the slim, cres-

cent moon. What a mysterious heart it is! What will she do with life at last?

So she loses her in the shade. But after a few moments she fancies she must have met Cecil at the gate, for she hears voices. Finally, however, she concludes herself mistaken.

It is an hour before Cecil appears. He saunters slowly up and sits down in Trixie's place, and Millicent sees at once that something has happened. "Well, sister," he says at last, "he has answered your letter."

Millicent gives a great start, and he smiles as she turns to him expectantly.

"O, inconsistency! he has answered it, as you bade him, to his wife."

"Has he, really? I am so very thankful! Did you bring it? Did you see it?"

"Yes, I brought it, and I saw it. She will be over in the morning."

"And he is — pray, what *is* the letter, Cecil?"

"It's a letter that makes one long to shoot him, by Jove, sis! What you women forgive us ought to canonize every one of you."

Since she does not care to extract information, nor to see him while he is in this mood, Millicent throws on a shawl and goes over to the cottage *ornee*.

She finds Trixie sitting under the lamp with the letter still in her hands. She sees her through the windows as she comes up. She is sitting there, absent-minded, drawing heads with her pencil all over the great square envelope, which is directed in that free, flowing hand that was wont to make her own heart flutter so when she descried it among the letters. Ah,

how long ago that was! how old she has grown! how bare life is of all those sweet roseate illusions! She stands there for a moment, outside his door, looking at his wife, with clasped hands, heartsick. The friendship, the friend, to which she has given the best of her life, has so utterly failed her, even as a friendship, even as a friend!

Trixie looks up as she enters. Without a word she draws her a chair, hands her the letter, envelope, pencil-sketches and all. Millicent sees that they are vignettes of her own self and Cecil; she can but smile tenderly to notice how the child idealizes her.

As she opens it, Trixie says, quietly, —

"The charm worked, Miss Challis — the letter came. And it seems to be all right, too, with him at least. Let's never tell him, Miss Challis, what a tragedy we made out of it. I should be ashamed to have him know what feeling I wasted. I have resolved to let it all pass by, and merely remember of it only this — that men are rough, crude beings. I do not think I shall weep my eyes out and lose my beauty-sleep another time for what my lord and master may choose to do and say."

Millicent likes not this tone, nor the words; it is not the sweet Trixie that said good-night to her an hour ago; it is the ordinary, weak woman, that it has never been worth *her* while to consider. She slowly opens the letter, wondering what blow has fallen — for this tone, these words, are far worse than tears or frenzy, — and for herself wondering a little also, since it is the answer to her appeals and to her condemnations.

It runs thus: —

"DEAR WIFE: I have been over busy since my arrival. But 'no news is good news,' I hope you have remembered. You know, of course, that had any accident befallen me, or illness, you would have heard at once.

"I cannot say just now when I shall be at home; but I trust you are amusing yourself, and enjoying to the full all the resources of the pleasant society and scenery around you. Take care of yourself; drive and walk all you like this fine weather. Tell John to see to the grapes in season.

"Supposing you let me hear from you often till I do come, at which time, if I have been bad, I will atone to the extent of whatever trinket you may desire; and for fear I commit Basil's blunder in '*Their Wedding Journey*,' — you know we read that together, — perhaps you better go down to Osgood & Deane's and select for yourself, and not wait for my arrival. I should like you to have a set of those purple amethysts, should they please you.

"I am in haste, and you will excuse, since I am

Yours, &c. JACK."

It is evidently a letter written at the point of the bayonet. Millicent's woman's blood boils as she reads it — reads from Trixie's point of view. And yet it is well enough perhaps, since it cannot be better.

She is herself at last fain to accept it as at least a resolute return to duty and honor. She turns towards Trixie with the first untrue smile she has worn since that day at church. "Well, my dear, did I not tell you that Jack put little meaning in his terrible-sounding words?"

"Yes, this letter makes them commonplace enough.

But I don't know, dear Miss Challis," she adds, rising and turning her bright eyes upon her, then away, "I don't know — I am frightened at myself for feeling so — but I don't know but what I would have preferred the tragedy I thought it to this, *to this!*" And she turns back towards her, and with a scornful movement of her little hands, flashes her bitter, humiliating perception of the whole truth full in Millicent's face.

Millicent goes to her, takes the hands in her own.

"No, Trixie; believe me, it is all right, or will grow right, if you yourself will be both wise and sweet. It is best sometimes, I presume, to bridge this sort of trouble with commonplace, with just commonplace. Now that Jack has laid such a bridge, do you cross over to him upon it."

And she looks with all her eloquent soul down into Trixie's eyes, as if she never would let her go unless she promised.

"*You* would not, I know."

"Yes, my dear, I would, were I his wife. Wife's pride and lady's pride are two very different things I should think."

"Shall I write him in character, as the bauble-loving baby he has addressed?" asked Trixie, with curling lip.

"What do you think yourself, my dear? Ought you not, perhaps, to write him as a woman who remembers she has given a solemn promise to love and honor him until death? not simply until he is cross and disagreeable."

Slowly the flash fades out of the child's blue eyes. Once more, and more than ever, does she seem like a simple gliding brooklet reflecting back the sun or the cloud, whichever it is that passes above her.

"Yes," she says at last, with that childish innocence that has always baffled Millicent, "yes; I cannot be like you, Miss Challis, can I, unless I should do as you would do? I will think of you, and I shall feel the kind of letter I ought to write. In that way I can do it, perhaps."

Millicent stays a little while to watch over her work. In her womanly endeavor as peacemaker she treats the affair, at least Jack's side of it, so lightly, and, withal, so unskilfully, that Trixie at last believes it may be only the usual ungracious mannner of the usual husband; in her secret heart looks upon wedlock as a mystery and a horror, and more than ever longs for her girlhood and her freedom.

When Millicent returns she finds Cecil sitting where she left him.

"Well?" he inquires, after a time, irked with her silence.

"Yes, brother," she answers. "I believe he means to do his duty. I think, so far as it is at present in his power, he has honored my letter. And it will grow better, brother. For one cannot long mean, in all his integrity and strength, to do his duty, without falling in love with it at last, and doing it cheerily and in God's grace."

And there is a brave light shining in her eyes, as if she had learned this lesson for herself, as God means each of his creatures to learn it, and had found it sweet.

"Very well; so mote it be! But, Millicent, have you not discharged your duty in the matter now? In fact, would not just the two settle it best and grow together more easily without you? The truth is, I

don't fancy you mixed up in these scandals, sister. Supposing, then, you take your little holiday trip to Philadelphia *now?*"

Millicent sits silent for some time. In truth she is weary with this long strain upon her heart. Little by little her brother's wisdom commends itself — wins upon her.

"Yes, Cecil, I will," she says at last; and then she adds, in a voice of unwonted tenderness, "your care for me is very sweet; brother, let us be good to each other always."

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS VANDEBURG'S ERRAND.

"The day of work is short, and the night of sleep is long,
And whether to pray or preach, or whether to sing a song."

"D. JOHN. I came hither to tell you; and circumstances shortened, the lady is disloyal.
CLAUD. Who? Hero?
D. JOHN. Even she; Leonato's Hero, your Hero.
CLAUD. Disloyal?"

DOMICILED in her uncle's gay town house, the somewhat perplexed and weary Millicent refreshes herself with the new music and the new pictures, brightens herself with the gayety of the new fashions, strengthens herself with the new thoughts and some of the old ones newly spoken.

Then, suddenly, she comes home.

She has corresponded, during her absence, both with Trixie and her brother. Both have proved themselves equally poor *raconteurs*. Their letters have been brief. Nothing of Trixie's self has appeared in hers: at this Millicent has been surprised, but has attributed it to her unaccustomedness to pen and ink. Cecil has spoken not at all of their neighbors at the cottage *ornee* — has evidently, Millicent thinks a little anxiously, considered *his* duty also discharged. Trixie,

in her stiff news-giving, has mentioned, among other things, that she often hears from Jack, and that he returns in November.

Millicent has not written to apprise any one of her home-coming; therefore she is not surprised to find Cecil out of town upon her arrival. She learns casually from the servants that Mr. De Riemer has not returned; that Mrs. De Reimer is at home, and well.

So the young mistress, finding that all is as usual, smiles at her premonitions, orders her trunks up stairs, has fires lighted in the grates throughout the house, and comes down and sits in her mother's little parlor, and tries to feel that she is at home, and to prepare to take up the usual Challis life again.

But in half an hour she finds the stillness of the great country mansion intolerable. She looks on, and so soon she dreads the days. Poor, beautiful, exquisite, scholarly Millicent! A level *is* a level, no matter at what height above the sea.

She makes a gesture of turning away; but there is nothing to which to turn only, as ever — the past.

As a strange heartsickness grows upon her, she wonders if the Strength that has supported her in the time of battle will suffice her now in the dead calm of peace. It was a strangely sweet experience — she longs to prove it constantly in her own personal daily life, "like other Christians," she says, thoughtfully. But to-day she feels the sense of Rest and Support slipping away from her; and there is all the stress of prayer in the sad clasp of her hands and the sad droop of her eyes. Her whisper is like a cry — "*Leave me not to myself!*" — a cry of terror and entreaty.

As she sits there, she wonders if it is wrong to be

so thoroughly discontented, wrong to long for duties when there are no duties. It is strange to-day to Millicent, that she alone in the crowded world should have no duties — should have such a great barren space of leisure to live and move in. Was it meant so from the beginning, or has it been her own mistake?

She thinks of Trixie; and involuntarily she thinks of her as she talked of herself that last evening they were together — as a girl like herself, younger, and with the tastes of a student and the fresh heart of a child. She dwells upon this fancy, and thinks that she, too, could find deep pleasure, and aims worth the living for, in such companionship. She is almost persuaded that there is the making of a lovely and noble woman in Trixie's nature; but she knows that unless Jack shall return fully master of himself, *she* may have no hand in unfolding these fascinating possibilities. She dare not count upon this delightful occupation of her time. She has, instead, already decided upon the distance and the reticence with which she shall subtilely envelop herself, the fine art with which she shall withdraw from the sudden intimacy; and she smiles pensively as she fancies the mystery she shall once more become to the child.

So it is still left her to consider how she may occupy and interest herself.

She rings and sends Berenice up stairs for a certain box. It contains simply circulars and catalogues. She selects one — a quaint gray leaf which her bookseller has sent her. It is a catalogue of recent foreign publications. She marks several, both in French and German, and thinks she will busy her winter with

translations. She remembers, too, that she has the Greek Antigone — one of Jack's latest gifts — still unread. But her old student's delight in the anticipated work does not seize upon her. She finds herself wishing it were *work* indeed; wishing the labor had some other object than pleasure and culture. She is very weary of this culture whose end is self, of this fine and silent dialogue between mind and mind, of this endless and emotionless evolution and development — at least she is to-day, and believes it will always be so now.

Other unusual thoughts and longings take possession of her. She looks down upon the life around her somewhat differently from what she has ever looked before; and she feels that, perhaps, it might be a vivid taste of happiness to be as those mechanics' wives who have their houses to keep, their babies to tend, their own responsible share in making both ends meet. She might, indeed, dismiss her housekeeper, and essay the oversight of the down-stairs bustle and stir herself; and then she smiles drearily over this trivial self-cheatery — she knows very well what the permeating zest is which would be lacking.

She takes up again her pencilled list of foreign books. She wonders if it would waken any fresh pleasure in her work if her translations were really *work*, and being made for publication; she knows that some women find any sip of fame an over-sweet draught; and her thoughts wander to other and original work with her pen. But it is only for an idle moment; for Millicent is self-analytic to that degree she knows herself merely scholarly, not creative — a critic to sit profitably beside a writer's table — not the writer herself.

She passes on suddenly to something like one of her olden girlish daydreams — the dreams in which she was to make such knightly gentlemen of Cecil and Jack. A gleam of the old ideal visits her, a pulse of the old, brave high spirit stirs her. She wonders whether it would be living her life uselessly should she gather about her within the great, beautiful, secluded house a dozen girls, — rare young girls, like her ideal pupil, Trixie, — whom she might educate, whom she might mould and train in manners and morals, in brain and in soul. She lingers over *this* thought; although, more subtile than any thought, there is a feeling which comes to her and disheartens her — that *she* is no Mary Lyon, and that the great, warm, throbbing, magnetic soul would in *her* be forever lacking. Yet she goes so far as to attempt the details. But life hitherto has not greatly demanded of Millicent that she should be practical; and her first inquiry puzzles her — how may she find these rare girls? girls who possess that wealth of nature which will repay her such long, patient labor. It must be a result of personal selection and subtile discernment. She is already baffled.

She turns abruptly away from this also; comes back to the actual, the existing, the trivial. She thinks she will fill the house with company, invite Regina to spend the season, and gather their friends from a city here, a city there, and keep high carnival, and make the winter one of Russian gayety with bal masques, skating parties, and sledge rides. It is not the best, but it is good, and seems to be all. Regina will be the master spirit. She herself shall find a certain sort of enjoyment in it, as a sight-seer, as an analyst, as a picture-lover, as a gracious hostess.

Poor Millicent Challis!

She sits in her mother's tall brocade chair and looks like a princess.. Her sweeping purple silk, her Elizabethan ruffs of lace, her coronet of pale brown braids, all heighten her slender stateliness. She is exquisitely fair and pale to-day; but in place of the sweet, expectant brightness of youth there is upon her delicate face the calm of elder womanhood; and as her fine lips curve with a sort of scorn for the gay plan upon which she is bending her thoughts, there is something about her of the cold beauty and the weary, insolent grace of Lady Dedlock.

Suddenly she leans forward with a look of astonishment. For the heavy ivy wreathing the west section of the bay window frames a picture so strange that she is tempted to think it an optical illusion. She sees Cornie Vandeburg reining in Black Selim before the door; the next instant sees her dismount.

With agile hands the tall equestrian ties her horse; and then, with her habit gathered upon her arm, she runs up the steps and rings a long, hurried, imperious peal.

Millicent hears her, through the half-closed door, speaking to the servant.

"Miss Challis has returned?"

"Yes'm."

Millicent hears her admitted and shown into the drawing-room. In a moment a card is brought her.

"Not at home to-day, Mary. My journey has wearied me."

She leans back, and wonders somewhat at this unwonted presumption. Presently the servant returns. She gives her another card, upon which, in a hand as

free and flowing as Jack's, Millicent finds a written message.

"I *must* see you. 'Tis a matter of life and death."

"You may show her in here, Mary — no, stay — I will go to her."

Millicent likes not strangers in these cosy interiors. The grand drawing-room is the least sacred portion of the house to her. She never sits there when alone.

Miss Vandeburg seems to have been waiting impatiently. She is a tall, coral-cheeked, flashing brunette; but she is as pale to-day as Miss Challis herself. Millicent greets her distantly; but after a glance at her, quite alters her demeanor; sits down near her, speaks first.

"Do I gather that you are in trouble, Miss Vandeburg? How can I assist you?"

"*I?* O, no!" A slight smile wreathes the lady's lips. A wave of color flows over her cheek, then recedes. *I* am not in trouble; I should scarcely seek assistance," — she pauses, and does not ungraciously add the finishing word, "*here,*" to her incomplete sentence.

Millicent looks at the card which is still in her hand, then at her again, and waits.

Miss Vandeburg clears her voice. "It is not *my* affair at all, Miss Challis — and still it is, as it is any woman's, according to the way I feel about such things. I was debating what steps *I* could take, or *would* take, rather, when I saw you passing in the hack, and so knew you had returned; and I decided to come to you, knowing that *you* were her especial friend."

Millicent sits with slightly parted lips, looking at her intently.

"Of course I do not understand you, Miss Vandeburg."

"No, of course not. And it is a very sorrowful thing to explain to you. It may not be true, however; or it may be. But excuse me — I will be definite. This morning one of our girls, the one that is especially my maid, brought Mrs. De Riemer's servant to me; and I gathered between the two that there was something they thought they ought to tell some one. And finally, out of tears, and fears, and surmises, and rehearsals of eavesdroppings, I concluded that Mrs. De Riemer is about to leave her home to-night; about to leave it clandestinely and scandalously. The two poor girls thought that perhaps *I* could prevent it. Were they not womanly souls? I bound them to strict secrecy; and I assure you I can depend upon my own girl, and I think upon the other also; and now, in my turn, only less puzzled and fearful than they, *I* come to *you*. As I said before, it may be nothing at all, or it may be the worst. I cannot say."

She makes a long pause. She looks at Millicent; tosses her head visibly at her cold, silent face, and, at last, rises to go — naturally enough after ten long minutes of silence.

Millicent rouses herself. She has become aware that her visitor is bidding her good-day.

"Stay — give me a moment more — let me consult with you."

She places her hand upon hers with winning grace, seats her again, sits down by her side. After a while she says, —

"Do you believe this yourself, Miss Vandeburg?"

"I do not know whether I do or not, Miss Challis. *I* do not claim to understand her. One cannot tell what she *would* do. I myself have seen nothing that would lead me to believe it. She is gay, volatile, wilful, full of little surprises — nothing more."

"I think it cannot be. When did you last see her?"

"Fifteen minutes ago. I called there. I could not charge her with such a thing, of course; but I saw no change in her manner. We talked of things to occur to-morrow, next week, this winter. She spoke lightly and easily, like one who expected to take part in them. But her maid says that all her jewelry and her boxes are packed and carded. I thought of telegraphing to Mr. De Riemer. I thought of volunteering a three days' visit there. I thought of a dozen wild schemes; and I am very greatly relieved, Miss Challis, to put the affair in your hands."

"*Her trunks packed!* Could the child be going to her Southern estates before Jack's return?" muses Millicent. "To *avoid* Jack's return," she thinks to herself, anxiously.

"O, innocence!" laughs Miss Vandeburg. "I beg your pardon," she adds, as she feels Millicent draw back. "You cannot suppose *your* friends capable of open shame — can you? Still, really, if I must say it, it is presumed to be an elopement, Miss Challis."

"*An elopement!* Mrs. De Riemer would never do that. With whom, pray, Miss Vandeburg?"

Miss Vandeburg gazes at her a moment. A gentle look comes over her face.

"I cannot say," she answers, simply, and begs

Heaven's pardon that it was not, "*I will not say*," instead, as it ought to have been. "Now, can anything be done?" she adds.

"If this is true, something *must* be done," Millicent replies. "You were right to come to me, Miss Vandeburg. It *is* I who can save her, if any one can. We *are* responsible, as you said. It was most noble and womanly in you to take some step in her behalf. *How* can I show you what I think of it, how grateful to you I am? for she is very dear to me."

Miss Vandeburg finds this manner, this look, these tones of the exclusive Miss Challis very sweet; and since she can appreciate her so, and feel all her charms, it is piteously hard that she must seem to her so distant and so far beneath. She turns away, her full lips clear cut and pale with that woman's pain and bitterness which only a woman can inflict.

"You could, perhaps, if you chose, make certain omissions in your manner." No, she has not said that; but the sweet, earnest look in Miss Challis's steady gray eyes has almost drawn it from her.

She silently inclines her head, and goes; and Millicent fully understands. She accompanies her to the door.

"Your horse — Wait, Miss Vandeburg. I will call Kirk."

"O, no! I am accustomed to being my own groom. I can mount alone here as easily as off in my woodland rides."

"Very well. I shall serve you myself, then," says Millicent, with a smile.

She sweeps down the steps bareheaded, — so white and fair, with the sun upon her face and her glittering

purple dress, — and with her own hands holds the horse. There is no further word of friendliness, or of meeting again; but as she receives Millicent's sweet smile and bow in place of formal adieu, Miss Vandeburg feels that she has gained her unspoken request.

CHAPTER XV.

BEFORE THE COTTAGE ORNEE.

"O, chuse; O, chuse, Lady Margaret, he said,
O, whether will ye gang or bide?"

MILLICENT goes slowly back up on the veranda. She does not re-enter the house. She stands a moment in the bright windy sunshine irresolute.

Then, throwing her scarf over her head, she goes swiftly up the angling western footpath, whose gate opens at the corner opposite the gate of the De Riemer place. Half way she can see the pretty buff cottage plainly through the thinning branches of the trees. The ruffled lawn curtains are blowing whitely in and out of Trixie's chamber. The garden is gaudy with dahlias and asters; it is a glare of gravel paths and flowers; and Millicent, in the midst of her own ancient, far-spreading greenery, involuntarily puts up her hand to shade her eyes.

She passes through the little Gothic gate where Jack, in his roundabout and Highland cap, used to come out as she appeared, and walk down to school with her — a little miss in short dresses, and white aprons, and Chinese braids. What halcyon days! She is not ashamed of a little painless sigh over their innocent happiness. And here she is now, after all these long years, with Jack's wife in watch and ward!

"I do not, for a moment, think it can be true," she says to herself. "But after seeing her, *I* at least ought to be able to say positively. And yet, she is so kaleidoscopic in emotion and action, I may not."

She walks hastily up through the little bizarre flower garden, steps through an open window into the empty parlor, passes through empty sitting-room and dining-room, and back into the hall, and is just going up stairs when Trixie herself appears at the top.

For a moment the two girls stand looking each other in the face without speaking; for the sudden change which has taken place in Trixie has likewise frozen the greeting upon Millicent's lips. Trixie has started back from her as from a spectre. Her face has paled to the ashen pallor of some great fear. She stands with uplifted hands. Millicent, nearly always mistress of herself, remains at the foot of the stairs with folded arms, looking at her keenly.

"Well, friend Trixie," she says at last, with that peculiar haughty curve of her lip, "do you not know me? or are you not glad to see me? or what is the matter?"

At the sound of her voice Trixie catches her breath, turns, then faces her again — the effort being visible.

"O, Miss Challis! — *is* it you? I did think it was your ghost! No one knew that you were coming. When did you arrive?"

"This forenoon. Shall I come up there to shake hands with you?"

These clear, icy tones seem to recall Trixie more fully to herself.

"No, dear Miss Challis, I'm coming down. You

startled me so I am not yet in my senses. Wait a moment, and I will show you that I am very glad to welcome you back."

In the second which elapses while Trixie steps back, closes a door and locks it, the girl down stairs stands with her teeth set upon her lip, as in the stress of some great agony.

"O, I fear! I fear!"

But she collects herself. With a quick eye she notes each slight token about Trixie as she comes tripping down the stairs at last — her hair, collar, sash, cuffs, all are in that state of slight disorder which attends active exercise. She decides that the indolent, dainty child has been unusually busy. Neither does she like the sound of a key. She receives her quietly, kisses her lightly, and releases her at once, and silence falls again between the two. As Trixie leads the way into the parlor and gives her a seat, she also notes the paleness which comes and goes upon the young face, as, still silent, she hands her a fan, busies herself with the blinds, and at last sits down.

"Have you been well?" Millicent asks. "You do not look well at all. And has Jack returned?"

"Jack — O, Jack will be back soon. Next week, he says. No, I haven't been very well. But you have, I see. What a magnificent purple! I wish I had commissioned you to shop for me a little. How warm it is — I fear you are uncomfortable — and how dusty it must have been on the cars! Are you not glad to leave the great, hot, dusty Indian summer world, Miss Challis, and get back to quiet, shadowy old Willowwater?"

"I do not know, Trixie. I expected to be; but

everything strikes me somewhat sadly here. Perhaps it is only because I found brother away. Do you know when he will return?"

"I? How should *I* know?" Trixie answers her sharply. "Why, what am I thinking of?" she adds, with a little laugh. "Of course I know. To-morrow, I think he said."

"I'm thankful it is so soon. I find it unusually lonely after my gay cousins. Indeed, I believe, my dear Trixie, I shall come over and camp with you to-night, old style, till brother returns. Shall I?"

Millicent prefers to fence with safe commonplace; but, to her surprise, after all, Trixie recoils as from the flash of some deadly weapon. She just sits and stares at her, and beneath that rare sweet smile which is bent upon her, seems to be losing the color out of her eyes. She answers at last, however — also with commonplace — deadly as Millicent's own it appears, since Millicent's smile fades out, and she drops her glance.

"O, Miss Challis! I'm sorry, but we're house-cleaning! Every bedroom in the house is torn upside down; that's why I didn't ask you up to my room. I couldn't make you comfortable to-night — I couldn't possibly."

It is hard to meet anything that looks like confirmation of Miss Vandeburg's story. She makes another safe little sally.

"O, well, my dear, it is not a matter for so much feeling, surely. If it's inconvenient, never mind. You can come over and stay with me, you know. 'Twill relieve me of my loneliness all the same."

Trixie laughs. Millicent sees "the knot climb in

her throat," and decides that the laugh has not a pleasant sound.

"What imp of inappropriateness possesses you?" she cries out; and her voice has a troubled, angry ring to it. "You forget that I am a housekeeper, with a few less maids than you. Of course I cannot come, with all this tumult to oversee; yet"—and the great drops break out upon the sweet low brow beneath the cloud of ringlets—"yet if you are really lonely, Miss Challis, I must try, of course. Only, please, do not sit up for me, for I am not certain, you know."

Millicent looks out of the window, and does not know what to think. She makes no reply. Under cover of the simplest neighborly words she has essayed to end the suspense and the doubt. She has not supposed it possible for Trixie to refuse the requests; and the granting of them would have set the whole matter at rest. But in her replies Trixie has left her to the same suspense, the same doubt—nay, has strengthened the doubt.

After a few moments she rises to go. They have talked casually of the casual occurrences that have been and are to be, and she is as much puzzled as Miss Vandeburg. She has been certain, and been uncertain. She has carried on a bitter struggle with herself. She has had hard work to overcome her disgust at various appearances of double-dealing; to overcome and to conceal her instinctive repugnance towards one who might be meditating such unwomanly sin even while they sat and chatted. She has never been ready with the mantle of charity to wrap about such a one; and it is not easier to do it now when it is her friend. She is aware that she shrank from the

child's kiss when she came down stairs; she is aware of shrinking from her touch; of both figuratively and literally holding her skirts away; but she thinks that perhaps it is only just that all these subtile, cruel penalties should attach to such fearsome moral derelictions; and that they should be inflicted by the hand of the sinner's sister woman. She vividly remembers Cecil's words, — How easily a woman's white hands spot! — and she is sorely tempted to pass safely by "on the other side."

And yet — yes, there has been a hard struggle between the purely judicial element in Millicent's nature and the softer impulses; and now, standing in the doorway, she suddenly turns. She cannot, any more than Miss Vandeburg, "*charge her with it.*" But she cannot leave her so, either. She takes her hand with that winning grace which she has oftener shown to this same Trixie than to any other.

"Trixie, my dear," she says, "I *would* come! I would let everything else go and come. Will you not, since I have set my heart upon it? Come, little one, give me your promise, since you will grieve me so if you do not."

Trixie seems studying the sweetness and earnestness of the proud, pure face into which she gazes. The old spell is upon her. But yet she does not smile, or cling to her.

"A promise is a promise," she says. "Therefore I cannot give you one; but perhaps, yes, *perhaps* I *will* come, Miss Challis."

Millicent stoops and kisses her. "I hope you do not love me less than when I went away, Trixie!" And she holds the child, sinner or not, to her heart for

a moment, and thinks "it shall not be for lack of other love;" and wishes, while she holds her there, that there would be one little sob, or that she would cling to her; that there would be some token, so that she might go farther and learn the truth.

She stands holding her in her arms a long, tender moment. She thinks again of what Cecil said — indeed Cecil's words are already presenting themselves before her as a fearful problem to be solved — but she believes her soul the cleaner for this sorrowful yearning over the child, this tender endeavor to save her with love — at least her sister's blood will not be upon it.

But there is no little sob; Trixie doesn't cling to her; there is no little token of wanting or needing a friend — so, perforce, she goes. She does indeed pause when she is half way to the gate. She has half of a mind to return and tell her frankly what she has heard. But here she looks into her own heart, and pauses.

"No, I must not. It *may* not be true. One finds so easily in appearances what one looks for! *I* myself would as lief die as have it said to me in so many words that my name was being whispered about in so dreadful a manner, and to know that a friend could even so much as consider whether it might be true. No, I will take the harder but safer way."

She looks at her watch — six o'clock. She does not know Jack's street and number, and the message might lie in the Albany office for hours. Should he receive it immediately, it would still be midnight before he could possibly reach Willowwater. Yet what else can she do? And if all should prove right, the anxiety which she really feels concerning Trixie's health will, she trusts, excuse the singular procedure to both husband and wife.

"O, if Cecil were only home!"

She attires herself for the street, and goes down to the telegraph office. She sends the simplest message:—

"*Come home at once.* MILLICENT."

She knows that her name will lend momentousness sufficient to the few words. She sends a second despatch to the Albany office, asking the immediate delivery of the telegram, at no matter what cost.

It is already nightfall when she reaches home again. She goes up the footpath, and looks over to the little cottage *ornee* before she enters. There is a light in Trixie's chamber; and she fancies she discerns a moving shadow.

She goes in and orders a bowl of black coffee; then goes up stairs and dresses herself afresh.

Just a slender black figure, she leaves the house and goes up the footpath. She pauses within sight of the cottage *ornee*, and in a moment is blent with the shadows. She is trembling already in every fibre, and she is glad to rest. She does not contemplate the night. It is early; she does not know how long she may thus have to stand on guard—all night, perhaps. If so, so be it—the night to come Jack himself will be there.

For hours she thus stands under the oaks within their own grounds, where she has the little lighted house and all the gates well in view. She resolves that upon no pretext whatever shall the child leave the house without her: be it to go down town, or to a neighbor's, or to a lover's carriage, or to the depot for journey or for lonely flight, she will accompany her,

welcome or unwelcome. Millicent has little genius for plotting, and she is duly thankful that this straightforward persistence is open to her.

Always, in the old dreams, she was to be personally brave — to be like a hero, or a knight, in some grand way, as, in possible events, a grand woman may indeed be. She remembers this to-night as she stands shivering and shuddering under the oaks in the darkness; and cold and calm as she has grown to be through the years, still she thrills with something of the old courage, and thinks that it would be the very best of woman's deeds to save another woman from shame and sin.

Now and then people living in the outskirts of the village pass along the walks homeward; but no one enters the De Riemer gates, or leaves them. The trains come and go upon which she might leave home; but she is sure no one has left the house. If there is to be any home-leaving, it must indeed, she fears, be as Miss Vandeburg said — clandestine, scandalous.

A light is still burning in Trixie's chamber. Once she herself opens the window, parts the curtains, and leans out. She sits there in the soft, starry darkness a long time, as one may in one's own house — still this adds to Millicent's disquiet.

By and by, one by one the lights disappear from the houses within view. There are no more passers-by. She cannot make out the hour by her watch; but she thinks it nearly eleven. Trixie has turned down her light; but Millicent perceives that it is still burning. It is but a trifle, but she likes it not. The rest of the house is dark and silent.

Millicent is wrapped in a heavy cloak, but still she

is chilly; and she grows momentarily nervous as it grows later. She draws her cloak around her more closely, and climbs the fence. She dares not open the gate — why, she cannot tell. She instinctively shrinks from making any sound, as if it might herald or hasten the tragedy. She climbs the second fence, and takes her station under the tall pine a few steps from the gate. She feels she ought not to be farther away; for if there is indeed wrong afoot, the time for it cannot be far distant now.

If Jack were only home! If Cecil — how careless Cecil must have been, intimate as he has been at the cottage, seeing her so lately as he evidently has, to have detected nothing whatever of this! Or is it some Southern friend, of whom they have known nothing, to whom the child has turned in her desertion and loneliness?

She leans against the tree, her eyes fixed vigilant upon the house. Its light tint makes its doors and windows visible; and the night is so still, so damp with coming rain, that a door cannot open, a gate cannot shut, whisper breathe, or step fall, without her hearing it.

The moments pass slowly, but still they pass; and at last she begins to trust it is all but a servant's foolish story. What would the child say could she know she was standing sentry at her gate? Doubtless she is sleeping her fatigued sleep, innocent of dishonor. But Millicent feels no embarrassment over her own strange position — the suspicion, the warning, would warrant the tender, womanly watch — but she does feel many keen compunctions. She runs over the little call in her mind; she blames herself for certain fri-

gidities of manner which might easily have frightened the tired girl into blunders and excitements of speech and look.

Suddenly she turns her head with a violent start. She looks around hurriedly. She wonders if she can have fallen asleep. She sees that the light is quite out now in Trixie's chamber. Can it be that silent disappearance which has roused her?

Something has happened, she feels.

She stands trembling for a moment. Then she becomes clearly conscious that what she has heard is a carriage moving slowly and softly along the broad turf upon the road-side. The street is broad, the night dark, but she plainly distinguishes it now. With bated breath she strains eye and ear; but her heart beats so heavily again she cannot tell whether what she sees and hears takes place in her imagination or outside; she thinks, however, that the carriage has stopped, and that a dark figure is busy about it. Then she really hears steps; and the gate near her is really unclosed — yes.

Millicent's strength bids fair to utterly fail her. Now that the perilous moment has come, she does not know what step to take first. The worst is evidently true; but she cannot move. She wildly thinks of rushing out at once, and up to the house, and joining Trixie, and remaining near her, be the hazard of mistake what it may; but she cannot move. The hour, the tragedy, the presence near her, seem to throw over her some benumbing spell. She can only keep her eyes fixed upon the house, and be hoplessly conscious that it may all happen, after all, and she not prevent it.

"*Trixie!*"

It is a low, careful whisper. She feels that the voice has addressed itself in her direction; her heart beats more thunderously than ever. She feels that the eyes beneath the tall hat are becoming fixed inquiringly upon her; feels that he well may have heard her heart beat. She is very sure that he is conscious of her presence there, will approach her. Her throat fills, there is a ringing sound in her ears. She fears she shall shriek in spite of herself, quite independently of her will; when, suddenly, everything again stands still — pulse and heart throb, and all nature — and then she clearly distinguishes light steps coming down the path from the house. She has not heard a door open or shut; but here comes the figure now — vague, small, hurrying — and the other at the gate goes to meet her.

With a mighty effort she springs out upon them. She reaches them with a swift bound. Her hand fastens upon Trixie's arm.

"Trixie! you shall not, Trixie; you shall not!"

There is a moment of breathless pause for all three; then, with a little cry, Trixie, looking from one to the other, throws herself, with a gesture as if she had chosen between them, into Millicent's arms; and the other, with an exclamation as if he had but just found breath, confronts the intruder. "A thousand furies! Millicent! You here!"

It is Cecil.

For an instant, in the darkness, brother and sister stand looking each other in the face. Millicent again and again essays to speak; but the words will not come — she waves her hand backward to the road, and turns her head away.

He glances down at the childish figure hidden in his sister's arms. The small hands clinging so tightly about her neck is answer enough, it seems; and without one word to either of them, he passes through the gate, and is gone. And I do not believe that beneath those pure eyes he would have taken her if he could.

A long, shuddering sob breaks, at last, from Millicent's lips. She tries to move; but the girl lies in her arms in a dead faint. She hears the sharp rattle of the carriage wheels, and then the whistle of the twelve o'clock through express down at the depot, knows it has stopped there, knows whom it has brought her. She *must* care for her burden now; she dare not trust the child now out of her own safe-keeping.

"But, O! my brother, my brother! that it should be *you!*"

CHAPTER XVI.

"PLAYFELLOW JACK."

"It is not so; thou hast misspoke, misheard;
Be well advised, tell o'er thy tale again:
It cannot be; thou dost but say, 'tis so:
I trust I may not trust thee."

"Here is her hand, the agent of her heart."

TEN minutes later Jack De Riemer is knocking at his own door. The house, somewhat to his surprise, is wrapped in silence and darkness. There is no appearance of illness within, or of any trouble whatsoever. He rings again, and yet again, in quick succession; and finally he pulls a peal and raps such an alarum with his cane as may well send poor Ellen, the chambermaid, who is up and dressed, to her own apartment, instead of bringing her to the hall door.

However, in process of time, this midnight racket rouses the one serving-man of the establishment; and at last the somewhat irate master is admitted.

"All well here — the mistress?"

"For aught I know, sir," the man responds, relocking the door.

"Give us a light, then. Your mistress home?"

"Yes, sir."

John steps into the sitting-room, and the master

stands waiting his reappearance in mood bewildered. Evidently no trouble within his own demesnes has been the occasion of his fair neighbor's telegram — at least, none in a man's acceptance of that word. A curious smile slightly stirs the mustached lip.

"It's some psychological woe, I dare say — perhaps has come over and caught the child at a crying-spell."

He is most acutely certain that Miss Challis has not summoned him in her own service.

He takes the light, dismisses the man to bed, and strides up stairs, wondering a little at the new dignity of this wife, who does not come to meet him. This unwonted negation of conduct recalls somewhat vividly the parting scene; and he steps more softly as he nears the top, and pauses a long moment as he comes to the closed door of her room.

"Poor child, any way!" he thinks. "I suppose I *have* wronged her! I suppose I *have* been brutal! I suppose I *have* demeaned myself like a villain towards them both!"

And here he puzzles for the twentieth time within the last few days over the serenity of the letters he has received from her. It must be, he thinks, the constancy and the forgivingness which is traditionally attributed to woman. Hers must be one of those sweet, spaniel-like natures which — like a species of algæ that will flourish if it but be within reach of the spray of the ocean — is satisfied, and will go on loving in its unquestioning, brooding way, if only so a smile be thrown to it now and then: his reading, if not his observation, has made him acquainted with such a class of women.

No, he never, for an instant, has doubted her love

for himself. Nevertheless, he has bestowed some considerable thought upon the fact that in none of her letters there should be either protestation or demand, question or doubt, or reproach, or any allusion whatever to their "little jar."

But upon the whole he has been rather thankful, and is even now, as he stands there and girds himself for life-long duty, that her affection has taken this quiet, practical form, and that their future life together may be so easily arranged therefore. Since certain words of his are beyond recall, have been spoken, he hopes they have been prolific of good, and that she *has* grown less trivial.

Still, to-night he has an unusually and uncomfortably vivid sense of things. Standing before her door, it shames his manliness greatly to remember all the brutal words which he has personally addressed to so merry and gentle a creature. He stands there feeling this his shame, until he is constrained to seriously promise himself that he never again will forget that she is a woman who is under his care and protection, no matter how much she may try him.

"Poor child! poor girl!" he says, almost tenderly, and with a little gesture, as if the pretty head with its bronze-brown curls was lifted for his caress — spaniel-like and sweet.

As he seems to press her to his breast, a dim conception of a really manly character, a wave of chivalrous feeling, a throb of the old knightly manliness with which Millicent Challis used to inspire him, sweeps over him, thrills him. He feels what a great trust a home is for the very first time, and for the very first time in all these weeks feels almost worthy to take his old

place in Millicent's memory. Yes, Millicent. He dares to think of her as he stands there. But it is with as little of heart-throbbing as he thinks of the "Agnes" in the book. She moves afar off in his life henceforth, ensphered in that same soft cathedral-window radiance which hovers about that other Agnes. "*That*, too, was a mistake!" he says.

Very gently, at last, he raps upon the door. He is aware that there has been no stir within, that she has given no sign of having heard the din of his arrival; and he smiles slightly to fancy how it will seem to be received with the serenity of those letters, and to query, if he wants a merry smile, or a sweet kiss, whether he shall have to woo and win the child all over again.

He receives no answer to his rap; and he waits a moment, doubtfully. Were it not a night made unusual by such a summons home he would not disturb her, since she must be sleeping. He finally wonders if it may not be that she has not been expecting him, after all.

Still, the telegram. He raps again. "Trixie!"

The unbroken silence, that peculiar silence which exists where there is no human breath or motion to inform it, begins to make itself felt. He knocks still once more. And then he himself opens the door. For a moment the interior is indistinct. Then he sees there is a light burning low upon the table — a mere spark. He turns his own up higher, steps across the floor, holds it flaring above the white couch. That stands beneath its lace draperies, empty, untumbled. He looks about in astonishment. Besides the burning lamp there are other tokens of late occupation. Her white Shetland shawl hangs over her chair. Her

worn, little croquet slippers lie carelessly beside the lounge.

Suddenly he goes to the other end of the room. Two trunks, strapped and locked, stand there. He stoops over them. They are bare of direction, save his wife's name.

He is surprised at this evidence of journeying forth, and hurriedly he leaves the room. In the passage he comes upon Ellen dressed, and with smooth hair, day-time fashion. Her honest English face is chalky white; but that there is news, intelligence upon it, he immediately discerns.

"Well, what is it, Ellen? and where is your mistress?"

The girl begins to tremble.

"O, good Lud, Muster De Riemer, hit hisn't me has can tell! She's gone, as I know'd she would, and been murdered hinto the bargain, and I never'll go hout hagain in a place where there's no perlice! A poor woman can do nothin' but scream hennyway, and that's no use where there's no perlice!"

Jack stares at her, and, owing to the trunks, is conscious of a sympathetic tremor or two.

"My good girl," he says, "your wits must be wandering, I think. *Mrs. De Riemer gone, and murdered!* What do you mean by such nonsense?"

He takes his own wits under control as he speaks. He brings the girl a chair, sits down himself, and with lawyer-knack draws from her, between her reflections upon the uselessness of a woman's screams where there is no police, all her fears and suspicions, together with a little solid information in the shape of bits of conversation which she has overheard. He listens

with a perplexed face, until, finally, she mentions a certain name.

At that he springs to his feet with a laugh which rings through the chamber — a gay, hearty laugh it is.

"O, you foolish creature! Cecil Challis, indeed! I understand it now, I think. I dare say your mistress has simply been planning to give me a little surprise, and asked his assistance. They have pretty likely passed me to-night on their way to Albany, and the baggage wagon will be round in the morning for her trunks. It was like the careless child to only half direct them, and very like her indeed to scream if the hackman let his horses start while she was only half seated. And now, I dare say, you have gone to Miss Challis, and frightened her, too, out of her senses with this bugbear kitchen-maid's tale! — haven't you, now?"

Ellen takes fire at this.

"Well, hit were a great way, I must say, for a gentlewoman to go — a-startin out hin the dead of night, when she 'ad hall the daytime before her! And hit wan't no hack nother! And that was a scream has *was* a scream, too! And I hain't no hidee, nother, has she was goin a-visit to you! And no more I hain't been to no Miss Challis!"

But her master still persuades himself that he has the whole matter in hand. He does not expect maid to know mistress's motives and plans. However, he inquires once more into the statements. He finds that the girl herself has put so much faith and fear into her suspicions, that she has remained up all night to watch the course of events. This fact, together

with another, — that his wife should not have apprised the girl of an intended absence, — somewhat staggers his common sense, in spite of himself. Still, the introduction of Cecil Challis's name renders the suspicion of evil something so absurd that he assumes an inevitably easy explanation of the affair; and he laughs again, and dismisses the girl.

He sits by himself a moment longer, the smile dying upon his lips, and remorsefully thinks that perhaps there have been sorrow and trouble in the child's heart, after all; that his protracted absence must have raised doubts of his good faith. He concludes she must have confided her anxiety to Cecil, and he generously have taken the unsophisticated child in charge during Millicent's absence. Perhaps Millicent has but just returned, and found her absent, and in alarm telegraphed for him; or, perhaps, has returned and found Trixie unhappy, and has her over at the mansion; and the carriage and the scream are an affair wholly disconnected from anything concerning his wife. In fact, instead of going to Miss Challis at once, he sits there and thinks these and a dozen other wild absurdities natural to a man who has never found a woman false.

Finally he does go down stairs, and so far as the corner gate of the Challis grounds. At that point he discerns a light in the mansion — in the tower chamber. He comes back, re-enters the house for his hat, and steps within the dressing-room for certain small renovations. As he turns from the mirror, his eye falls upon a letter lying whitely upon the dark crimson cover of a table. He idly steps aside to look at it; takes it up, after a second, with some surprise, since

it is a sealed letter directed to himself, and in Trixie's awkward little hand.

A strange feeling comes over him. He hesitates to open it. He is fain to ignore each and every token of mystery; but he cannot well away with this one. How they press upon him! he thinks, half angrily. It does not seem to matter that he has come home resolved upon a life of quiet, domestic monotony and honor, as befits

"A loyal, just, and upright gentleman,"

who has made the mistake of wedding with a pretty child, instead of — well, he forbears, at a warning twinge of honor. His face whitens somewhat. The tragedy which he has opened seems to sweep onward quite regardless that he has changed his mind and rung the curtain down.

At last he puts down his lamp, closes the door, sits down by the table, and addresses himself to what may be before him.

"You say you are coming home Tuesday, Jack.

"Well, I do not think now that I shall be here to meet you. I could live with you, if you remained in Albany and I here. I *would* try to do that faithfully. I *could* live with you by letter. For letters I can, if I choose, tear up, and thus destroy unsuitable thoughts and feelings. I can reconsider, revise, and rewrite them, and so, at last, send you only those which I think will please you.

"But when you come, Jack, *then* things would be likely to go in the old thoughtless style. I am certain of it. I should flash out unwise thoughts; perhaps I

should, in time, come to answer you sharply, if you were unkind to me; indeed, I feel that I should, because every day I forgive you less and less for what you have done to me. My looks and words would pass into your keeping, and I should have the privilege of changing nothing. Do not you see?

"No, Jack, I am sure that I could not, day by day, present to you the carefully-prepared conduct which would keep you tolerant of me. *I* do not like *you* now, since I have considered.

"O, foolish Jack! What children's play this has been! I have grown older in your absence, and I see it all. What a mess we have made of life!

"It is worse because I think there was, perhaps, something so different within our power, after all. There is, I find, a better quality of love than yours; and I find, too, that even *I* can inspire it. It is a love which gives respect and consideration, instead of your kind of admiration; there is, instead of your impatient, intolerant contempt of my ignorance, a tender strength which would have patiently taken me along up the heights, too, instead of leaving me in some little bower of posies at the foot. You might have known it would be tiresome coming back so much. No man ever gets very far up so — unless, indeed, he finally leaves 'his mistake' behind him for good, as I find you have been tempted to leave yours. You are not coming home to me because you intended to do so *at first*. Did you suppose I was never to know *that?*

"I might, I begin to think, have grown out of my babyhood by your leave. But *that* I could not have,

it seems. For if I am not Millicent, neither, Jack, are you Bayard nor Sidney!

"I have no hard task in leaving you. I have no compunctions concerning you. I am nothing to you. For my poor weak sake you would not sacrifice even so much as your small privilege of speaking aloud your angry, disdainful thoughts. I wondered then if that was the best there was of love, after all. But I have learned since, Jack, that there is a love which would sacrifice honor, home, and name to shield me.

"I suppose I am doing wrong; but there is no *right* way back to happiness for such as I. And it is not *your* heart that I shall break. I shall sorely grieve some one, but it will not be *you*. It is not quite what I would have liked to do — the sister is far dearer than the brother — but the beautiful daily friendship would be impossible with *you* here!

"But I shall strive to grow as near like her as possible. For the rest I have no fears. Sir Lancelot was *true*, at least; true to the end; and, to my taste, nobler than that other knight, the husband Geraint, who could, upon occasion, drive his Enid before him dressed in faded silk and in rags.

"Therefore, good by, my poor playfellow Jack. You must e'en mend your bungled life as best you can, same as

"TRIXIE."

A look of horror has grown upon the husband's face while he has held himself to this long reading — horror and pity indescribable.

"That child, that poor, innocent, ignorant child!

Villain and villain, the pair of us! What have we not done between us. Curse you, Cecil Challis! I'll cure *you* of *your* villany!"

He snatches his hat, and rushes from the house.

"Trixie, Trixie, you blind, unhappy child! My God, how can I save her!"

CHAPTER XVII.

BETWIXT TWO.

"Affairs that walk
(As they say spirits do) at midnight have
In them a wilder nature than the business
That seeks despatch by day."

"My life itself, and the best part of it,
Thanks you for this great care."

MILLICENT stands in the open midnight casement and waits.

She is alone. For the moment there is a closed door between her and the shadow which she has taken into the Challis household; for within the last half hour she has had the choosing between two dire shadows as to which shall abide under the roof with herself.

Bitter confessions have been made to her, hard promises have been wrung from her, within this half hour. She means to keep these promises: she thinks she can; for she has once more been made sure, *sure* that God helps his creatures that cry to him for strength. But still these are over-hard promises. She is left with her brother's dark debt to pay, besides all those obligations which a pure and strong woman may think she owes to another weak, sinning woman who relies upon her almost as upon Heaven

itself; who, in fact, in her despair, relies upon her *instead* of Heaven.

She has no thought of failing her; still, she has come hither to tremble a little by herself for a moment. She knows that her own life now is involved, forever perhaps, within the labyrinth, within that tangle of mystery, and sorrow, and shame from which she has shrunk so long, from which any maiden might well long to make escape.

If she does keep these promises, however, the days of idlesse are over — the dreaded days of empty longing, and ennui, and inward rust. She feels this, with the rest, and there is a sudden brave glint in her tear-stained eyes as she lifts them upward to the soft, dark sky. Perhaps, she thinks suddenly, her life has purposely been left free and empty for this.

As she stands there she hears in the stillness a distant gate shut sharply; she catches a distant echo of opening and shutting doors. These sounds have their own secret significance for her, and she sets herself to consider the questions that must shortly be put and answered — questions which she must answer unadvised, problems of which, all unstudied, she must make solution.

In the midst of her grave reflections she lives over again and again that scene, just past, of life-long farewells. "O, Cecil, Cecil! so false, and yet so true!" She bends her head with a rain of tears. Was it only yesterday noon she felt so worn and old? Ah, and she has lived a century since! She feels it in her soul. She shows it in her face. In her plain black dress, with its severe linen about throat and wrist, she seems, indeed, scarcely Millicent Challis — rather that pale

abbess of the ages long ago, who received Arthur's sinning queen, Guinevere, into sanctuary.

She patiently waits in her casement. She discerns dim sounds at intervals. At last, in the night, and among the shadows of the grounds, she grows conscious that he is approaching, and that the supreme trial of the whole hard ordeal is at hand. She stands motionless, like some carved figure in mediæval niche, looking down from the unlighted window, waiting for the dim sound and movement of which she is conscious to gather and deepen into definite step and tramp; for the shadows to condense into a moving figure; she knows that the darkness and the night must inevitably soon yield him whom she dreads to see — no spotless, blameless Arthur, nevertheless wronged and betrayed.

"To avenge *me*, also, was it? O, Cecil! O, brother!"

Suddenly he issues from the darkness, a man striding hastily to her door; yes, she is the sole Challis here now.

She looks down upon him a second, while he knocks. He knocks twice, and in the pause she sees his hand lifted to dash the sweat from the bared white brow.

She takes the lamp, raises the light, and at once goes down to admit him. They meet without word or smile. She takes him into the library. He ignores the proffered seat, and stands and looks her in the face, and groans, and yet does his best towards the proper decorum in lady's presence.

"Yes, Millicent, it is plain that you know it all. Great Heavens! that it should be *your* brother!"

"Yes, Jack," she says bitterly, "*he* was my brother, and *you* were my friend.".

He remembers. Yes, he himself was fain to have committed Cecil's sin not so long ago — it was to Cecil's sister that he had proposed it.

He glances at the pale girl standing before him in her slender black-robed height. There is infinite sorrow, infinite reproach, upon her delicate face.

"I know, I know!" he says, bowing his head in open shame before her. Then his harsh laugh echoes through the room.

"Pinks of chivalry we! Shamed sister and shamed friend, you better pray that we may sweep each other from the face of the earth, and that poor, lost child between us. O, Millicent, where *were* you that you did not save her!"

She sweeps his face with one keen glance. Every feature is convulsed with the agony of that bitter and useless thought. Her own soften, but she remains silent. There is that within her which feels it is only just and well that he should suffer all possible gnawings of remorse. She believes in that as the fire which destroys and purifies, having herself felt it.

Her silence is a long one. In her pure, cold presence he suffers to his utmost. She stands mute, and hears his self-accusations, beholds his weakness, his helplessness, his exceeding bitterness. She is sorely shaken once. It is when he lifts his eyes to her, and says piteously, —

"And I had come home a better man, Millicent, truly a better man. And it was not for your sake, nor for my own, but truly for *hers*."

Still she is silent. Even this is but his just punishment. Suddenly, then, at her calm, his face darkens to its old manly strength.

"Millicent, since you are so terrible and perfect in your sense of justice, you cannot, I think, once wish to condone even your brother's sin. Could you condemn me should I sweep him out of existence?"

"Is it *he*, then, Jack, who has sinned most deeply against her?"

He bows under the firm white hand that hesitates not to press him into the lowest deeps of his punishment. Deemed unworthy to chastise the man who has wronged him by reason of his own greater and double sin, he leans his head upon the table, and Millicent hears his wretched sobs.

Suddenly he turns and flames upon her, even upon her.

"We have *all* failed her. You, too, proud girl, whom she loved better than she did either of us; *you* shall not go unscathed. I suppose her little weak, childish hand grew loathly the moment your suspicion was roused, and you turned away and contented yourself with summoning *me* to witness the ruin I had made; that was like a woman, pure and merciless! You would not reach out and snatch her away, would not touch the poor little hand! Millicent, you who knew so much, you that summoned me, could have known more, could have done more! As I live, Millicent, while I was gone, and knowing what you must have known, before God you were your sister's keeper! In my soul I believe you could have saved her! There are three of us, girl!"

Millicent's voice shakes a little as now she breaks her silence.

"Jack, has it never occurred to you that I may have done so?"

For a moment he seems not to breathe. His eyes fasten upon her. Feature by feature his whole face pleads to know what in the deep weakness of this great, sudden hope his voice cannot ask.

A pitying smile in the searching gray eyes answers him at last.

"Forgive me, Millicent. I might have known it by the law of contraries. I never once yet have judged you rightly. But I *might* have known *this*, I should think, after your letter." Then he rises. "Where is she, Millicent?"

But he receives no answer.

"Ah, you doubt me. You fear to trust her with me. Is that it? Millicent, before Heaven, I will never deal her one reproach; *I* am the sinner. Where is she?"

"I cannot tell you."

Jack stares at her.

"I thought you said —"

"Yes, Jack, I did give you to understand that she was safe. She is. She left your home in perfect and honorable safety. She laid not her hand in Cecil's for even one moment, took not one step in his company. But further, Jack, you may not inquire."

"Millicent, this is far too little and far too much. She is my wife, remember. Where is she? I demand it of you, if I must!"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean to say that you do not know?"

"I mean to say that if I do I will not impart the information to you."

"And why? O, Millicent, I do not need further punishment. I have only the tenderest pity in my

heart towards the child. Millicent, cannot you trust me?"

"*She* cannot, Jack."

He storms, threatens, pleads. Millicent makes quiet reply, —

"You must be content that she is not with my brother. There is an eternity of silence between the two. For the rest, she has sought asylum, and I will not betray her. If I would it would be useless. She does not believe in you, Jack. Cecil, unfortunately, has told her all we both could wish her never to know. It has, together with your personal conduct towards herself, proved fatal. All that which you can fancy or fear she might feel concerning you, be assured that she does feel. It was no weak nature you were dealing with. It was a merry, ignorant one, but not a weak one. She stands now in equal horror of both you and Cecil; but to her horror of you, Jack, contempt is added."

"And you, Millicent, would allow her to go from you feeling thus towards me; what kind of friendship is this?"

Millicent turns her eyes full upon him. They are eloquent with reminders of the past.

"Ah, yes," he says, "I remember. I understand. I am a perjured wretch in the eyes of both of you. And it is useless, I suppose, stern Nemesis, for the miserable outcast to ask what he shall do with his own solitary life henceforth; I dare say you have not given *that* a moment's thought — neither you nor she."

Millicent speaks very gently.

"Jack, I have not meant to be too hard. Consider and see whether I have. I might have allowed you

to think her fate was unknown, that the worst was true. Instead, I freely gave you credit that you had no unmanly resentment against her. Since you had cast her openly out of your own heart, I gave you credit that you would feel a manly thankfulness, as well as relief, to know that, not wholly disgraced, she had found a refuge, and would leave her in it unmolested. You *ought*. Frankly, Jack, I myself think that, doing as you have done, and since she knows the whole, you have no right to know of her further, only as it is of her own free will. I say it at once, and the more decidedly because I am satisfied that even could you see her it would be useless. You cannot make terms with her as you might with a woman of the world, who knows that hearts are of mixed composition. To poor Trixie good is good and bad is bad. Since you have not loved her all in all, you have not loved her at all. Since she cannot respect you, she abhors you. After giving her so much reason for this bitterness towards you, I must say that, in my mind, the least reparation in your power, Jack, is to leave her to the healing silence of the years, and to the sanctity of her shelter.

"As for yourself—" Here she pauses.

The strong justice of her nature prompts her to abandon him to the mercies of his awakened conscience. The womanly longing to soothe and to encourage urges her to point out to him the open paths back to honor, since she knows that for a man they are *always* open. She means in her maiden might to make such a path for Trixie too. This feeling — that for an erring woman *the path is as yet always to be made* — renders her reply to him just a little cruel.

"Ah, Jack," she says, "I am no Nemesis. You

know full well what I would have you do, have you be — worthy of a woman's love, worthy of a woman's trust, even though for ever hopeless of such reward."

Jack silently bows his head. After a moment he asks, —

"And who, meantime, is to care for my wife's good name?"

"Since you have put it out of your own power to do so," she answers, "it will be, so far as it can be done at all, she who has cared for it hitherto — just a girl. O, for shame, Jack, that you have forced me to spot my hands with scandal! to interpose my own name between yours and the world as a shield! *This* time I cannot save you wholly. You have all sinned with too high a hand. Besides, I will warn you that the secret is not in my keeping alone. I will buy what silence I may as regards the bitter inside truth. It shall be my lifelong care, for the dear sake of all three of you. Still it cannot but transpire that there is trouble and separation. You must bear the certain stigma of your sin as best you may; so also must poor Trixie."

He sits with bowed head listening to what she may choose to reveal, forbearing to question further of what she may choose to conceal. Millicent pauses at last out of very pity. The humiliation of that noble head touches her heart. With sudden tears in her eyes she looks at that fine face, upon which, for all that which has passed, there is no trace of grossness or of petty fault.

"O, Jack," she cries, "you are still Jack to me; how can *you* have done this! How *can* you so have failed me! so have failed yourself!"

This is a bitter, passionate sob. But he does not misunderstand her. Shaken with a hundred regrets, he scarcely trembles anew at this most bitter-sweet appeal.

"Millicent," he says, "I respect and honor you above all other women. I will show it by obeying you. I will put myself out of the case. Understand me — it is of my own free will, as penance, as atonement. For, of course, Millicent, I could defy you. Of course I could seek out and find my wife. Any impenetrable seclusion is not possible in this age of the world. I cannot even assume to suppose that *you* will not be in communication with her; that she will not, indeed, be more or less within your keeping and guidance. It would not, I assure you, be difficult tracking, were I so minded. But I will covenant to give you both absolute liberty of action, give you my word of honor that I will not follow up any clew to her retreat should I ever chance to come in possession of one. Is *this*, in any sense, worthy to be called 'reparation,' Millicent?"

"Yes, Jack, it is."

"Since she abhors me, it is certainly all that lies in my power. For yourself, Millicent, all else that I can do is, as a man of honor, to make you the only gift I have which is worthy of your acceptance — your brother's life. You must, of course, know that Cecil's life has come within my keeping, Millicent."

"I do *not* know it."

She is about to speak further; she has turned upon him with a face of keen light; but he waves her aside with the old expressive gesture.

Then they part. Millicent gives him her hand. Not a great while ago, over a certain letter, she had thought

she could never so much as touch his dishonored hand again; but he has earned it.

"A long farewell, Jack," she says.

"So I suppose. That I am henceforth scarcely a suitable visitor, my own respect for you, Millicent, would have reminded me. Give me long farewell for long absence."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE SEA.

"And my regret
Becomes an April violet,
And buds and blossoms."

"There's rosemary, that's for remembrance."

IT is summer and Sabbath by the sea-side. The little northern fishing village, with its still coves, and its wooded promontories, and its white shelly beaches, and its lovely back country, has its usual small number of ease-loving, beauty-spying visitors. To-day the inhabitants are all at church. Those who come hither out of the great, noisy, careless, sceptical world are not so many as to overrule the New England staidness of the natives; the biblical simplicity and integrity of the life of the place are as palpable and penetrating as the moist sea breeze and the blue bright weather; and church-going soon and invariably becomes a habit with visitors.

Hither, for the last three years, has come Millicent Challis. She comes with no gay party, but alone with her maid, and her ponies, and her books. Each season she stays through the midsummer far into the October solitude and coolness, like one in need of long rest and protracted self-communing. Here she serves her-

self with somewhat novel society when she chooses. Her phaeton with its black ponies is known to the back country for miles, and her name is held dear in many of the rustic households by reason of certain gracious charities.

These charities, however, are the charities of a scholar — her early dreams being prophetic of herself to the end. God's grace has made her good and useful as Millicent Challis — not as another.

It is the bright lads and lasses of the country-side that boast most of her acquaintance. In this old, low, red farm-house, where she buys her glass of cream, is a tiny but choice library of her bestowal. Each book has her autograph within, making it doubly sacred to the dreaming eldest daughter, to whom it has been given, and whom the lovely donor has already spoiled for many of life's vulgarities. At the white cottage on the hill, she meets her French scholars twice a week during her visits; and at the great dairy in the glen she has a class of boys in Latin, among them a couple of fisher-lads whom she has undertaken to see through college by and by; and yonder at the wooded ridge all the children of the county, for aught she cares, may meet her any Saturday to hammer among the rocks and stones, and learn the pretty mysteries of wreaths, and crosses, and transparencies made of the autumn leaves, and look at the spiders and bugs through the wonderful glasses.

Since anything in the shape of benevolence, except cold money-giving, comes so awkwardly to her hand, Miss Challis greatly enjoys this episode of congenial employment, — now that its practicability has been pointed out to her, — and each year she lingers longer.

This season she has made her appearance at the little beach hotel earlier than usual. She has brought an invalid with her. This invalid is said to be her housekeeper; but Millicent tends her with an appearance of tender solicitude which the cottagers delight to dwell upon as adding the one angelic touch which was needed to perfect Miss Challis's loveliness.

It is not often, is it, that a woman of thirty, is denominated "perfectly lovely"?

But if you look at Miss Challis to-day in her pew at church, you see that she is far sweeter, far more youthful-looking, than at twenty-five, or at twenty. The coldness and pride, once habitual, are not visible in her expression, change as it may. The greatest difference seems to be in the expression of her beautiful eyes. Golden-gray, large and steady in their outlook, they are so warm and frank; and that golden tint also seems to have been gained through the years — her eyes used to be thought of a gray remarkably clear and cold. Her lips, though they rarely smile, are sweet as with smiles. That weary, cold, Lady Dedlock air about both face and figure, which used to characterize her so few years ago, is gone. It is an attentive, womanly, noble, high-bred face; but look and consider as you may, you cannot satisfactorily define the change which there has been — that fresh, tender, auroral brightness which she has gained is not to be analyzed. You feel that it is the token of some divine youthfulness of the heart, some sweetness of the soul; but it is an elusive radiance — as elusive as her grace and elegance of movement.

For she has, with the years, lost none of her girlish slenderness and delicacy, none of that princess-like

elegance of movement. The stranger-clergyman in the rustic pulpit starts as his eye falls upon her while she is passing up the aisle. He does not see her face, but he is perfectly aware that it is Millicent Challis, though he is hundreds of miles from where he last saw that lady, and it is years and years ago.

He rests his gaze upon her face as, all unconscious of it, she seats her companion in the easy corner of the pew, and gives some other little attention to her comfort. What a tender way! What a sweet smile, if it really is Millicent Challis! He has not heard one syllable concerning her all these years; but wife or maiden, he knows that she has found some abiding pleasure in life.

Well, so be it.

He dwells a little upon the loveliness of her face. He often has pictured her as she must now be, if living, — a cold, pale, haughty, beautiful woman, not a lovely one — one of the perfections of culture — its classic coldness, not its sunny beneficence. Upon this face there is not a trace of punishment received. Of any suffering whatever, of discipline endured, there is not a trace. She has sinned her sin, prospered, grown good, and sweet, and fair. It is not what he expected; his human sense of justice is outraged — but, still, so be it.

She has not as yet lifted her eyes to the pulpit. If she had, it would have been without surprise, since its occupant these summer weeks is usually some transient clerical stranger.

In her dress of sea-mist tint, exquisitely pale and fair herself, with all the delicate coolness of her white lilies and laces about her, she sits unconscious of any

scrutinizing eyes. As one who has never known sorrow, has had no past, she seems to be only peacefully cognizant of the cool breeze, the sunshine, the soft lapping of the waves, whose clear blueness — that of sky, and atmosphere, and ocean — is found in two great sea-pictures by the broad, open doors on either side the desk.

He sits looking at her until the bell ceases tolling. He is too deeply human not to wonder whether the sweet calm of her face will not be disturbed at that moment when she shall first hear his voice. It is fully his intention to glance, and see, and know.

Nevertheless, he never does know.

He rises and stands by the open Bible. When the fine, full voice breaks the summer stillness of the little church, Millicent does look up. But he does not see her. With the first words the earnest habit of his thought and his life returns upon him; and he forgets her — human as he is, bitterly faithful as he has been to his love through all these years, still he forgets her utterly.

It is *her* turn for surprise and reflection. At the very first sound of his voice she lifts her eyes. There is a quick flash from the great, dark, widening pupils, there is a play like pale lightning over her face for a brief moment. But when the impassioned reader remembers her presence, the moment has passed; and now he cannot tell whether she has recognized him, or with what degree of feeling. He believes that if she has recognized him, there was some emotion shown. It is too sweet a face, too noble, to have remained merely indifferent. However he may interpret the past, he cannot easily fancy her now as unjust, or un-

sympathetic. When in *her* life has she found the Living Springs? It is not love's fountain — he divines the truth — she has drank from the deeper, diviner one of duty.

He intends to scan her face now and then in the course of the service. But beginning his sermon, he quite forgets her again. This sermon is an old one, but one which has been written in some electric hour, in some mood of clear sight and far-reaching faith. It is one of those few utterances of the human soul which never grow tame, no more than a psalm of David; and he stands and utters it anew as one may fancy Whittier reading his "Astrea at the Capitol," or the Laureate his "Morte D'Arthur," or his "Enone." Do you suppose they ever turn with weariness from their own divine words, as we mechanics from our careful work?

Millicent is sure that, fronting him as they are, he must have recognized her; but she feels that he stands there unconscious of her now; and she has a certain pride in the masterful greatness of the man who has thought these thoughts, understood and rejoiced in these things, and rejoices anew and afresh in them in the very presence of all the past. And she also is somewhat borne out of herself. She does not trace his steps with her old habit of critical analysis: she rather intuitively and synthetically comprehends the quality of his intellect, his faith, his Christianity.

But when the sermon comes to an end, and she has settled back into her usual calm, she looks a little curiously at him while he reads the closing hymn, as if she would verify some of the old impressions. The

cold, dome-like forehead, the fine, line-like lips, the square jaw, the burning eyes, still make up the face that grew to terrify her through her æsthetic perceptions, and in subtile obedience to the power of contrast, since young hearts, like flowers, turn to the sunshine; and she calmly thinks that no human face ever before had the sunshine in it which "*that other face*" had, and, in spite of all, has still; she speaks of it to herself as she would of a face in a painting.

This face, too, remains the same, save as time has deepened the character of each feature; but at this altitude it gives an impression of grandeur and strength which suit with the Bossuet-like eloqueuce.

Still, with a perceptible shrug of the shoulders, a sudden touch of the old girlish wilfulness, Millicent thinks to herself, —

"Yes, it is really a fine pulpit face; but all the same it is not one to sit opposite at breakfast three hundred and sixty-five mornings in the year. I would not object to him in the library as suiting with the busts and engravings, but in my sitting-room — ah, I was right enough, I dare say!"

But as they pass slowly out she has many other thoughts. He is standing in the pulpit still, leisurely surveying his congregation. When opposite, Miss Challis looks quietly up at him and bows. Gravely he returns the greeting. It is with no surprise; it is only with mere recognition, full recognition, although Millicent is aware that she has given him, unmistakably, permission to come down and speak with her. Though a faint color comes to her cheek, she respects him none the less that he does not accept it, and herself none the less that she gave it.

She gives her arm to her companion, walks slowly, evidently for her convenience. This companion is a slight, graceful, quiet woman, dressed quite in black. At first glance she seems older than Millicent; at the second you cannot tell; and at no other time would you become certain. She has heavy, pale, golden hair, and gentle blue eyes, and a gentle face. She is Millicent's housekeeper; but there seems to be perfect companionship between the two, for shortly Millicent says,—

"Were you interested in the clergyman to-day, Lina?"

"Yes, for his manner, greatly. That was like some of the young Roman Catholic priests I remember at St. Thibodeaux — one of those who only look inward and upward."

Romish, certainly; but Millicent has never held quite this mystic view of him. She wonders if Lina may understand him, after all, better than she did, better than she does. She has, it seems, a great respect for her housekeeper's opinions.

"But should he look outwardly, Lina, how would it be?"

"Outwardly — at you, Millicent, or at things?"

Millicent smiles. "At me, we will say."

Lina considers. "Well, he would take you as you chose to seem, I think, quite so, until he found reason to make a study of you. I do not think," she adds, slowly, "that I should like him to make a study of me. You, Miss Challis, might be able to stand it."

Millicent interrogates her curiously.

"Well, because he never drops a subject after he becomes either interested or puzzled. He would take

you up at intervals his life through, dissect you, puzzle over your careless words, discover hidden significance in them, place your most careless actions under a magnifying glass. It might do with you, Miss Challis, who are, indeed, as a great rose-diamond is — each facet will bear gloriously the test of full light."

"O, hush, you foolish Lina!" Millicent says, tenderly, and with a little gesture, as if, were they not in the street, she should draw her to her side with a caress. "But you have judged correctly, Lina. Ah, so terribly intense! I always said he was by nature a monk, a Jesuit, one of those smileless men with whom it would be torture to live."

Lina looks up at her. "*Always said!* You know him, then!"

"Yes, Lina, slightly — having been once engaged to him."

"It is Ralph Shumann?"

Millicent assents.

"So, that is the man! Ah, well, Miss Challis, you are just the two to have misunderstood each other. He is no Jesuit; but it is almost as bad, for domestic life, to require intensity and truth from another as perfect as his own; and he would, I fancy. But as for himself, he is as simple, and direct, and honest — yes, and as intense, too, I own — as a beam of daylight. He is just like one." And she makes a swift, straight little gesture with her forefinger.

"Ah, a' straight line — is that he? Do you really think so, Lina? Perhaps that was it. Well, I believe I think better of the Straight Line than I once did. I believe I *have* learned that Beauty's Curve is not, after all, quite the use in life that Duty's Straight Line is."

The pretty, dark-tinted, bannered little hotel has been in sight all the way from church. They have been walking slowly; but at this pause in their conversation they find themselves near their entrance. Their momentary attention at once convinces them of fresh arrivals and some unusual stir. At the south corner of one of the upper balconies two or three strangers are standing in a little knot. At this instant another steps through the window, joins them, and immediately they turn and follow him in.

"That's *our* corner," Lina says, regretfully. "The adjoining rooms must be taken; we shall not have that shady corner to ourselves any longer, I fear; and so good-by to the long, perfect forenoons. What is it? Who is it, Miss Challis? Is it Mr. Schumann?"

For Millicent has suddenly stopped her. Every trace of brightness has left eye and lip. Lina sees her with an expression of dismay still gazing up at the empty balcony.

Finally she catches her breath like a sobbing child. "No, Lina dear, not Mr. Schumann — far worse! Come round this way. Be brave now, for, my Lina, *Jack is here!* But you know we often have spoken of this very possibility, and I believe, as I have for the last two years, that if you are brave and cautious, there will be no trouble."

CHAPTER XIX.

UPON THE STAIRS.

"One flash of passionate sorrow trembled through
The dust of which I had been dimly made,
One fierce, quick wish to be of marble too."

"CEL. Come, you look paler and paler; pray you draw homewards."

BUT they meet face to face upon the stairs.

Millicent has a moment's warning of it. Half way up, with Lina behind her, she hears voices in the hall above, and they both stop.

"I say, De Riemer, poor Hal is booked for over the Styx this time, sure!"

And then she hears that voice of music which she has almost forgotten in these six years — how vividly true it is to all its old rich, clear tones! one of the rare voices that suggest color; it is charged with a warm golden hue, — and for a moment her life is flooded with a strange, shimmering sunshine; and, though Millicent is no weak woman, all that she has outlived rises in wan ghostliness before her; she can climb no height where nature's laws cease to be in force.

It is not an unhappy moment, however, and she looks back at Lina, as Jack finishes speaking, with tender care.

They both have heard his words plainly.

"Think so? The doctor says he'll pull through. Where's that confounded waiter? I sent him for some pounded ice an hour ago! Here, I'll go myself!"

And there he is at the top of the stairs, and they midway. But Lina motions her on. The gentleman discerns them, politely retreats, and waits. They are in the shadows still, he in the full light. For a brief moment Millicent weighs the chances of swiftly passing him as a stranger. Were the risks of meeting over then, she would do so. But, as she steps into the light, she is aware of the shock which she gives him. He has recognized her. In the instant she sees the smiling, handsome stranger change, first into an image of consternation, then into the ancient friend, and then into the grave and humble man that exchanged long farewell with her so many years ago.

But, though conflicting tides of emotion rush through her own heart, she reads at a glance the nobler quality of his life and thought, and she thinks that he deserves to know a tithe of the sincere pleasure she feels at seeing him once more. Besides, it can scarcely be that they shall forever escape the ordeal which they have risked.

She stops, and reaches out her hand with a frank smile.

"Jack, old friend, this is a pleasure."

He grasps it with boyish fervor.

"Since you permit me — O, Millicent!"

And the strong man's lips tremble as he looks in her face and holds her hand. It is a long, earnest, smileless gaze, and in it he renders her thanks, promises anew all the knightly promises he has ever made to himself or to her.

"I am sincerely glad to see you; do not doubt it," she says, as she gently withdraws her hand. And then she glances back at Lina. "My dear Lina, Mr. De Riemer, an old, old friend of mine. Miss Purcell, Mr. De Riemer — my housekeeper and friend."

To Miss Challis's friend and housekeeper, though she be the most quiet and commonplace of women, Mr. De Riemer bows his courtliest. As he raises his head, his brilliant black eyes rest upon her for a moment. He sees a gentle, pensive woman dressed in black, with pale golden hair simply netted, and a jet cross at her white throat — just one of the millions of women who have learned sorrow and death by heart.

He turns back to Millicent and explains his sudden presence. Three friends and himself have been yachting about in summer idleness. One of their number has been taken ill, and so violently that they have thought it advisable to make the nearest landing.

"Thus I cannot say how long we may be obliged to remain here," he adds. "The poor fellow cannot be speedily removed, I fear. He is a solitary man like myself, has no relatives to apprise; so bachelor friendship must e'en be faithful. Still, Millicent, I will not force *you* away. *I* need not stay. Some one of the others — "

She puts up her hand deprecatingly.

"Poor fellow! shall not Miss Purcell and I come in and see him by and by? Sickness where there's 'lack of woman's nursing, dearth of woman's tears — '"

Jack's face beams with pure, boyish gratitude.

"I could not ask it, but if you *would!*" and he includes Miss Purcell with his grateful glance.

Then he says, aside, to Millicent, as he walks on

beside her a step, "In you this is pure goodness. But your friend here, with her mild Sister-of-Charity face, would not be so far out of the way, I fancy. So, if you will, Millicent, drop in after dinner in the character of 'Santa Filomena;' forevermore

> A lady with a lamp shall stand
> In the annals of the yachting band."

"Jack, have you forgotten me so well as that? You know that I abhor parody," Millicent interposes, but it is with a smile.

It is over-pleasant to her, these first few moments, to meet again with the merry, mocking, chivalrous Jack; her eyes are misty with the rare pleasure, and she is like a mere girl with the heart that is so much tenderer than she thought.

"Well, pardon me, for the sick man's sake. The truth is, your offer is so very timely there's something most detestable about the room — heat, and glare, and stuffiness."

Millicent promises her presence soon, and then she and her friend pass on, and Jack hastens down stairs. The sick man's room is on their way, the door open, and they glance in. The sunshine *is* streaming in, sickeningly, through every window in a hot yellow flood. A great, glaring chromolith of a flower-girl, in a scarlet frock, hangs over against the side of the couch, and upon this they see that the heavy eyes of the sick man are fixed. He is evidently in a high fever. He looks altogether uncomfortable; his face a deep red, and his head sunk in a nest of feather pillows. One of the yachters stands near, vigorously fanning him with a newspaper; another sits reading.

"Why wait?" urges Lina.

So, after a brief hesitation, they do go in — Millicent pale and swift, looking like Una in her lilies and her pearl-like fairness.

"We are friends of Mr. De Riemer," she says, with a slight glance of acknowledgment as the gentlemen rise. "We could not pass and leave a sick chamber so uncomfortable. Even sea-side sunshine is unendurable to one who is ill."

When Jack returns with his ice, he finds the place looking a little less like the barracks of a "Legion in Algiers," a little less as if all tender womanhood might be congregated in "distant Bingen." The shades have been lowered, the blinds turned to admit only cool shadows and the breeze, a servant is removing the bright table-covers and replacing them with white, Millicent busy with vases and Swiss violets, and Miss Purcell directing the placing of certain cool, elastic air-pillows beneath the sick man's head. That accomplished, she waits, and herself makes the little bags for the pounded ice, brushes the tangled hair and beard in default of due attentiveness upon the part of his male friends, and daintily and deftly straightens the spreads.

Millicent stands waiting for her now; but still she lingers, giving the servant directions concerning a tray and fresh spoons.

"And now, Mr. De Riemer," she adds, turning to him, "should you remove that gaudy little French girl, with her exceeding red dress, your friend would be quite comfortable, I think; that must burn his eyes like a lamp — and we will send you a big fan from our room."

The sick man has a listening look. His heavy eyes

wander to the painting and back as she speaks, and a pleasant expression settles upon his face. He nods his head, with a great effort, towards her, and looks at Jack.

"I'll have her hang in its place."

Miss Purcell steps out of range with a little confused movement that seems to greatly vex him.

"What! so bigoted as that, boys! I tell you, De Riemer, I'm no Catholic, but the Madonna belongs to the whole human race. I'd like to hang her pure face in every man's room in the land."

He stretches his hand back imploringly for the living face, which he fancies, in his delirium, to be a picture, and the next moment drops into heavy sleep.

Jack looks from him to Miss Purcell. With a smile he forces the personality of the compliment upon her acceptance.

"He was right. There is no time when the presence of a pure face would not sway the worst of us — believe him, Madonna, in behalf of all of us."

He speaks in a tone that cannot offend. For a moment the two look into each other's eyes. Miss Purcell's face is strangely stirred; it is with some underplay of the inner life — there is lightning behind the gray cloud — but yet the thin cheek does *not* flush, nor the steady, pensive eye brighten. Jack is vaguely conscious of this lightning behind the cloud. He dwells for the first time upon her face, and unconsciously he prolongs his gaze because he is puzzled; he is puzzled because he cannot tell whether it is a young face or not. It is a childish mouth, even with its sad curves, its sad droop; the eyes are tender blue, but, fronting

the light, their hue looks faded, either with time or tears; the pale golden hair is laid plain and smooth, as elderly women lay theirs; but he is possessed with an odd fancy — very like Jack De Riemer to have it, too, — that he should like to see it once brushed back. He thinks, critically, that bands are a style too heavy for her face. And then, after having gone quite through with this leisurely contemplation, he becomes aware that the lady is forcing herself to bear the unpardonable scrutiny. He turns away much discomfited at that moment when it appears to have grown unendurable to her, at that moment in which Millicent calls, warningly, "Lina!"

"In a moment."

"Miss Purcell waits, however, to arrange the vials and spoons to her liking, and then, bowing their acknowledgment of many grateful thanks, the two leave the room.

Millicent puts her arm around her protectingly the moment they close the door. They walk along the passage together.

"Child, how did you dare linger so — dare undergo such a scrutiny! I do not understand you, Lina."

"I wished to have it all over with once and forever."

"Shall we not go away from here, Lina? Everything shall be just as you say."

Miss Purcell answers slowly.

"No, no, I think there is no need."

"O, Lina, are you sure? We do not *need* to stay at all. I would take you to the Catskills. You remember that delightful Mountain House?"

"Yes; but, Miss Challis, I do not fear to stay — not

now," Lina answers, quietly. "Instead — " But here she pauses again.

All at once a great, bright, happy thought flashes upon Millicent, a thought which never once in all these six years has visited her before. During the half hour in the sick room she has decided to leave the place. Her old, maidenly repugnance to being thrown once more in the society of these two men has seized upon her. But still, if it indeed be duty, if all the long labyrinth is perhaps to end in this sunny, straight-on path —

"It shall be as you wish, my Lina," she says. "Remember that if at any time you should wish to go, we will go at once."

CHAPTER XX.

"THE SMELL OF THAT JASMINE FLOWER."

"Hush! was there anything in the dark —
Like a whisper or cry, in the dark?
'O darling — my darling!' were the words that seemed
To be breathed in my ear; but I must have dreamed;
It was only a dream I know — but hark!
Is there anything, anything more in the dark?"

FOR Millicent herself the soft, bright sea-side days pass as if she were living in some old, involved Spenserian tale of romance.

An outside life of quiet and serious forms wraps an inner one intense and mysterious. The sick man cannot be removed. Jack has volunteered to remain to the end; and the others have finally gone their pleasuring ways — so the three constitute a small circle, like a family, around the lonely bedside of the stranger; and in behalf of mother and sister, she and Miss Purcell daily perform those gentle womanly offices that soften life to its close. But while she is occupied with these grave duties, and involved in various companionship necessarily grave, she considers the future for the first time for years. She thinks she dimly sees a great purpose, faintly sketched, in all that has happened. Her thoughts wander on and complete it in beauty that she does not really hope for. But she

does believe that there is a secret Hand that has led them on, and led them together, and means to lead them to the end. She steadies herself by this faith, and thanks God that, perhaps, she is really the strong, brave woman that she sometimes feels herself to be these days. She hopes Jack to be worthy. She knows Lina Purcell to be. She prays that she may stand between the two wisely.

But Millicent Challis feels no longer the impulse to flee from *any* duty which her position, her intellect, her influence, her womanliness may impose upon her. If her place in her world is so high, why, she must needs be braver and truer than some others for that world's sake. If her intellect is stronger, she must be wise for those who are weak and mistaken — especially for those who have gone astray. If her influence is so deep and far-reaching, she herself must, for example's sake and as encouragement, live, and do, and dare, even to the height and breadth, even to the full measure of her ideal. If she be exquisitely pure and womanly in seeming, she must live an exquisitely womanly life — which is to be, she begins to perceive, very gentle, very compassionate, very patient — even unto charity — and more faithful to the sinning and the sorrowful than towards the strong and the happy, if she must choose between them, as often such a woman must. Yes, such a woman must give a large share of her life to others — God must have meant that; and she must choose to whom out of many.

In a school where mistakes are seldom made — the school of Present Duty — Millicent has been an attentive and obedient scholar. She has, above all things, feared that she should not be a practical Christian.

With earnest hands she has wrested *her* share of the infinite meaning out of the New Commandment, "Love one another." In the light of Christ's life she believes that that means, "Love those most who most need love." That was what Christ *did*.

Light is promised to those who love the light; and her ideals of womanliness have broadened and deepened day by day during these last six years. They have swept her far beyond her fair lady-mother's standard, and out upon the great open plains of independent thought, and even into an almost untrodden wilderness, as she considers what woman may — *may, ought* — to do for woman; a wise, happy woman for a sinning and discouraged one. This idea of duty has led her already strange, tortuous ways, but always at last, thank God! up the heights and into the light.

Yes, surely, that was what He meant — Love one another, and those most who need most!

"My Lina!" she thinks, with unutterable gladness; and, thinking of her, Millicent sometimes longs to fly abroad and preach this new gospel to all womanhood. To this loved Lina she — just another girl — has been teacher, mother, sister, friend; and she holds her to her heart, and believes her a pure white soul at last.

She has not, however, made this Lina a woman like herself. Lina is another woman, an independent mystery, even to the teacher who has loved, and guided, and moulded her. Even to her she is elusive, not to be understood and defined — like a ray of light, a waft of fragrance, a strain of music.

Save two members of Miss Challis's household, and one outside, no one has known this Lina, only as a

friend whom Miss Challis has taken into her house ill unto death, tended and nursed through a long season of fever, and then installed permanently as her housekeeper and companion. But her duties in the Challis household are known to be merely nominal; and she is, from various indications, generally supposed to be nearly as close a student as Miss Challis herself; is known to be a fine musician; and there are whispers afloat that she has written two or three of the sweetest poems, and some of the most delicious little stories in recent literature.

These are but rumors and impressions, however. The pale Miss Purcell herself is so reticent, so quiet, so shy of general society even when she mixes in it, that little of her, beyond her music, is really known.

But Miss Challis herself moves among the people about her far more than of old. This change in her is of the quiet Lina's accomplishment; it is one among many changes which she has wrought. She has, perhaps, done as much for her teacher as her teacher for her — at least, her teacher thinks so.

"There is wisdom and wisdom, I find, my Lina," Millicent has said to her; "that which is of use solely to one's self, and that which helps onward Heaven's good-will towards humanity. Yours is of the higher sort, my dear, and I will do my listening becomingly."

She has comprehended, long ago, with a sadness which was at first hopeless, the inherent coldness of her own nature; and she has loved Lina best, not for her rare gifts, nor her delightful society, but for her warm, sympathetic attitude towards all humanity, for her golden heart. This faded woman, so shy for herself, has said to her, —

"It is not at all wholesome for society when women of exquisite purity and culture withdraw themselves, and live for their own quiet delight. Nor is it wholesome for yourself, Miss Challis — one needs breadth as well as height. All the sweet, earnest young girls would be better for your smile and your presence among them. Do I not know? You ought not to sit apart and criticise them. Go among them, and inspire them. When there comes a gracious, noble, lovely woman, all sweet girls are far more ready than you think to fall in love with her, and fill their dreams with her presence as an inspiration. Do I not know?"

The scholarly Millicent *has* done her listening becomingly. And thus, it may be, has she come by this sweet and radiant expression upon her face: that it is the beautiful blossom of some long growth, one may be very sure. Jack De Riemer has been studious of this change these days; and this morning it is what he is musing of chiefly, as he idly turns Miss Purcell's music for her.

He has been hearing her — the elder Santa Filomena; so he has decided it at last — play a movement from one of Chopin's sonatas. It is one of Millicent's old favorites. He remembers it very well, and with what a diamond clearness and coldness the notes used to sparkle forth from her touch: that frosty sparkle is vivid in his mind yet. There has been a pearly sweetness, as of a spring morning, in Miss Purcell's rendering — a tender, pervasive warmth and freshness. Looking into the touching faded face, the serious blue eyes that dream while she plays, he perceives for the first time that the quiet little Madonna woman has a nature of passionate warmth and depth,

and doubtless lives a life of her own. He looks at her also as the writer of the bit of verse some one handed him yesterday, with a whisper, "It is that Miss Purcell's, you know."

"You have been abroad, I see, Miss Purcell. That is the true Lizst touch. You are one of his pupils, perhaps?"

A faint color spreads over her cheek, a tremulous brightness springs into her eyes; and Millicent, who understands both cheek and eye, smiles to see what wondrous fullness of pleasure her friend finds in this delicate appreciation of her artistic playing — playing really worthy to be thought the result of musical culture.

"Not at all," she replies. "This is only one of my home studies with Miss Challis."

"And is this also one of your studies with Miss Challis?"

He slides the little poem, with a smile, before her.

But Miss Purcell does not take the compliment at all lightly. Her color comes and goes, as upon the cheek of a school-girl. "And the unseen Master hears —" She reads a line of it over.

"No, Mr. De Riemer, *that* is one of my sweet lessons with Schoolmistress Fate."

Millicent is at the farther end of the apartment. She is sewing, and singing to herself for her own entertainment. It is a simple tune, quite unlike herself, but which is suited to her voice nevertheless — that being, strangely enough, only a small, liquid, warbling parlor-voice. Her playing is clear and brilliant; but her voice, as Jack used to teasingly tell her, is fitted only to sing tender ballads to an audi-

ence of one. Miss Purcell, while she talks, touches a light accompaniment to the little humming song, and the room is a long one, and she does not often hear what the two at the piano say; but, "Ah, ah," she thinks, "what if it *should* be!" and then she smiles to remember afresh that it is true that

> "God's sweetness flows around our incompleteness,
> Round our restlessness his rest,"

and thanks him for the large gaze and the large faith that enable him to know it.

By and by, in the sunny dream of good yet to be, her voice lapses into silence. The two at the piano are talking on in all the cosy leisure of a long seaside morning; and she smiles again to find herself forgotten, and Jack, at last, under the spell of Lina's conversation. The music still ripples dreamily from Miss Purcell's fingers; but her touch is so light and soft that she hears Jack when he says, —

"Pardon me, Miss Purcell, but I think I must have met you before this — not lately, to be sure, but sometime."

Millicent's work drops from her hand. She rises and crosses the floor towards them; but checks herself suddenly, and pauses by a stand of flowers; and, trifling with them, tries to fathom what she sees and hears. But the two, being outside the covers of a book, and thus having various privileges and advantages, it is not easy to understand them.

Miss Purcell herself is not startled by this question; but she is evidently stirred. She looks up at her interlocutor. A gleam as of sunshine plays over the still blue of her eyes until their tint grows violet,

sweet, and deep; and they emit such a smiling flash as she turns away, that Millicent fancies the laugh that the smile was like, and having before this learned to tremble when human hearts are stirred, she trembles now for Lina, or Jack — she scarcely knows which.

Jack's gaze grows graver; but he evidently is not considering Miss Purcell — Millicent knows that rare, introverted expression of his.

"I do not wonder that you are surprised — excuse my presumption," he says. "It must have been simply something about your eyes, I think. I see now that they have been reminding me of one I really did know — poor child, she was very different from you!"

Millicent trembles, and longs to hush the sweet and haunting music that Miss Purcell continuously plays. She skilfully interposes now and then; but chat and question as she may, Lina still plays on — she has an endless repertoire, it seems, at her fingers' ends. It is none of the new music — they are all old melodies and tender little airs, long forgotten, of years ago. Millicent dimly perceives intention in all this; but she cannot decide what it may be. She looks at her musingly. Some subtile wilfulness seems to possess her, some hidden excitement is upon her. Her thin cheeks are flushed, and she refuses to meet the warning look.

"Non ti scordar di me,
Non ti scordar di me,"

she sings; and then dreamily her voice ripples on through the verse.

Jack is talking to Millicent, but he stops abruptly and listens.

"My thinking of her, or the music's strain,
Or something which never will be expressed,
Has brought her back from the grave again
With the jasmine in her breast.
She is not dead, and she is not wed!
But she loves me now, and she loved me then.
And the very first words that her sweet lips said
My heart grew youthful again.
But, O, the smell of that jasmine flower!
And, O, that music! and, O, the way
That verse rang out from the donjon tower,
Non ti scordar di me,
Non ti scordar di me."

As if quite indifferent herself to the pathos of either words or music, the notes change under her careless fingers into those of the "Beautiful Blue Danube."

Millicent moves uneasily. *This* is cruelty! She, at least, knows what Jack may be suffering, since it is the waltz poor, childish Trixie was always humming and thrumming.

But he does not stay to listen; and Miss Purcell herself involuntarily pauses as she hears the closing door. She sits motionless, without raising her eyes; but her expression changes rapidly, so rapidly, so sorrowfully, that the reproaches die upon Millicent's lips.

"O, Lina! how did you dare!" is all she says.

"It was not wicked, I think," Lina says, humbly. "The feeling came over me that I *must* know whether he had suffered, or *could* suffer."

Millicent muses.

"Ah, well," she says, at last, "I cannot say that it is not your right, Lina, if you dare. Only, my dear, do not cause needless pain."

"No," says Miss Purcell, rising, "only to myself."

Millicent looked greatly troubled. She clasps her hand as she stands there.

"Pray take a womanly care, my dear, that there be no *needless* scenes and embarrassments. Do not be cruel simply for the sake of cruelty. Will you not promise me?".

Miss Purcell looks up at her wonderingly. And then suddenly her eyes fill with tears.

"No, you cannot trust me, even now. You are the one woman who is tender and true, but even you cannot *quite* forget that I have sinned, that once I *was* unwomanly."

Millicent feels her quiver all over as she puts her arm around her. She divines what arrow she may have planted in the sensitive breast.

"Lina," she says, "I know there is no purer heart than yours. I can think, also, what a temptation yours may be. But you are so safe now, I would not have you lightly risk such complete freedom. You could never gain it again. That was all. Poor child," adds she, "must you always take it as a personal allusion when one utters the word 'unwomanly'?"

But the playful smile and the light tone are lost upon Lina.

"Yes, I must!" she cries, bitterly. "You, of course, do not know. How should you? But there is no one day in which I am spared! All the merciless criticism, all the scorn, with which the world speaks of the sins and mistakes of woman, falls on *me*, lashes *me*, reminds *me!*"

Millicent stands silent. This is a new glimpse into Lina's heart. With a quick intuition she understands.

She holds her close to her own pure heart, but she cannot comfort her, she cannot save her from it.

No. Brave and strong, truer and purer, she may grow through the years, but none the less she still must pay this one penalty. In this life no power, human or divine, can remit it. A thousand times, upon the white robes of her soul, with her own hand, she will fasten the Scarlet Letter.

Surely, this is enough!

CHAPTER XXI.

A LONELY WOMAN.

"I cannot bear to think what life would be
With high hope shrunk to endurance, stunted aims
Like broken lances ground to eating-knives,
A self sunk down to look with level eyes
At low achievement."

"Disparage not the faith thou dost not know,
Lest, to thy peril, thou abide it dear."

TO-NIGHT, as is usual now, Millicent is sitting by herself. From within, through open doors and windows, she hears Lina's voice in the sick room. There the earthly end of one life is fast approaching. How desolate the stranger's fate seems to her! What tragedy without trace does his life enclose, that he has made no friend to sit by his side while he dies?

Millicent knows why she trembles over it. Her head droops upon her hand. Cheek, and eyelid, and brow grow pale as she reflects concerning her own loneliness through the coming years. She has a feeling that the labors and the pleasures which have occupied her the last years are drawing to a close, that she is soon again to take up life quite afresh, and alone, and at a point far back in the past. She cannot find her joy to-night in remembering that she may have wrought happiness for others. She wonders if her

life is forever thus to repeat itself; is to be a mere matter of episodes; is to lack any grand unity of purpose and accomplishment; and whether she is evermore to lavish love, and care, and labor while the lives she has blessed sweep on outside her.

She feels an intense longing to-night to see Cecil; he alone has loved her with true love — poor exile. He is in Europe, a hard-working man in a German counting-house. She resolves that under certain circumstances she will shut up the place at Willowwater, and go to him. She fancies she might make a little home in his hotel for him, and so bless *his* life a while, and, perhaps, be loved and made content herself. She sketches plans of study in music and art. She shall hear Liszt; shall hear the Wagnerian music in all its glory at the hands of the grand Germans; perhaps hear Bülow render Beethoven. There will be various pilgrimages; and Goethe and dear Jean Paul to read anew in their own native atmosphere; and for a week or two, at least, there will be the vivid, varied life of a foreign tour.

Ah, yes! It is a touch of the ancient ennui.

It is not without great dreariness that she can thus return to the old self-life. Still this is good, since it must surely be something to have Cecil once more: it is strange to realize *that she has only Cecil!* She half envies the style of woman of whom is her cousin Regina. Regina, like any Challis, is beyond criticism; but she has, over and above her birthright of being herself a Challis, one hundred sincerely beloved friends. Well, she is herself; not Regina, nor another.

So she sits in the moonlight, and folds her hands upon her lap a lonely woman of thirty, but not an

unhappy one. She well understands that. As she listens to the sea that sweeps about the earth with its long, ceaseless moan and sighs, she knows very well that to-morrow she shall smile, — since she means to hold fast by the faith which she has proved, — and think her life at its worst worth the living.

She repeats to herself a snatch of Lina's little poem, —

> "And the never-ceasing sound
> Of our laughter and our tears
> Dropping nightly, singing lightly,
> Rises up throughout the years,
> Ever daily, ever nightly —
> And the unseen Master hears."

"Yes; and since He hears, why not rest one's self quietly?" As Jack's and Lina's voices float out to her, and she thinks afresh, with a touch of hope once more, "Yes, the unseen Master hears," she sees some one, whom she fancies to be Ralph Schumann, passing along the brightly moonlit street below. She bends over the railing, and looks after him for a moment. She has often seen him during the fortnight. He is boarding at a cottage a mile or two back among the farms.

She leans back in her chair, with the old, weary movement. One woman, with all her dreams, evidently cannot make the world over anew. But she thinks, with a lofty scorn, that were she a man, with a man's right to forgive and to know himself forgiven, there is a line of knightly conduct that she should pursue were she in his place, and receiving recognition so gracious as hers have uniformly been. She feels no weak regret that she has bestowed such recogni-

tion; only a quiet, scornful wonder that he should know nothing of the grand forgiveness and the grand friendship of which she can so easily conceive.

She turns from the ideal Ralph — there is such a Ralph once more — to the man as he manifests himself. It is with bitter pity.

"Ah, I will not deceive myself in him again; to be intense is not to be great."

Still once more she reverts to the large thought, the large love, the warm, sweeping earnestness of the Ralph Schumann in the pulpit; but she turns away baffled, utterly, concerning him. The woman who has learned how to forgive even to the uttermost, cannot comprehend him. Just a moment with her great gray eyes gloriously golden and bedewed, and a breathless rapture in her uplifted face, she pictures what it would be to be loved as *she* could love. It is not Jack, and it is not Ralph. It is only the pure, personless dream of the sweet woman who would be loved with a love that would love over and around even to perfect hiding, and overwhelming, and blotting out all faults, and mistakes, and sins. . . .

From her dim seat she sees Jack, by and by, step out from the window of the sick room. A long half hour he paces up and down his own section of the balcony. Here and there the moonlight reveals his face to her. Poor, grave Jack! She who knows him so well knows that only the knowledge of bitter mistakes, only bitter perplexity, ever renders *him* thus grave — life's inherent weightiness and mystery are powerless to thus sadden him — the handsome Epicurean.

Suddenly he turns on his heel, and comes down where she is sitting, as if he had been aware of her presence from the first. He takes the chair near her, but remains silent — a privilege of the old friendship which the two have not resumed.

For a brief instant, a faint, strange sensation, as of remembered music, or of some vivid, vanishing perfume, steals over her. It is the first time they have been alone together since — O, since so long, long ago — far back in the other life. But it is only for a moment. She glances at him uneasily; not but what she may trust him, though. No, he is not thinking of *her* at all. That is evident. She smiles over it.

And as for herself, the old habit of self-analysis is as strong as ever; and she looks curiously into her heart. And as for herself, even were he free to offer her his life's best, she smiles gently at the quaint comparisons which cross her mind. It would be addressing a class of such long-perished emotions! She thinks of the aged talking parrot which a traveller found in Maypures, which no one could understand, because it spoke in the language of a perished race; and of that old Bible of Brainerd's, printed in the tongue of an Indian tribe now wholly extinct. Truly love from his lips now would be

> "as meaningless
> As letters fallen asunder that once made
> A hymn of rapture."

Still she studies the moody face somewhat anxiously. She has all her ancient horror of complications, even though she nightly prays for certain blissful endings, and herself means to be brave, and wise, and cool to the close.

"Millicent," he says at last. His voice is constrained and husky. His head is resting on his hands, and he does not look up when he has finished speaking.

"Millicent, it is a year now since you have communicated with me concerning her."

"Yes, it is nearly that, I believe."

"I suppose there is nothing to tell me, or I should have been told. She is well?"

"As usual, yes. Her health is always delicate."

"Poor girl! Millicent, talk to me about her! My mind has been full of her all day. I could wish to-night — I do not know what I could *not* wish! — both her life and mine are such hopeless wrecks!"

"No, Jack; I think not, in either case. Most certainly Trixie's is no wreck. She is a noble woman, and happy in many pursuits."

"Millicent, does she ever speak of me? I dare say I've no right to ask; yet — "

But here he is interrupted. Miss Purcell comes down the room hurriedly, steps through the window. "Miss Challis! Mr. De Riemer! Will you come? There is a change."

They hasten along the balcony, and pass quickly in. Yes, the end is near. The nurse still waves her fan to give him air, but chest and throat stir with but a light, fitful breath. There is no trace of fever or pain; the expression is one of utter weakness.

But his ear seems to catch the rustle of their approach. He opens his glazing eyes, moves them around the little circle. His whitening lips stir. The whisper is but a motion, but they understand.

"There is a clergyman down stairs," whispers an

attendant, and, at a motion from Millicent, leaves the room.

His eyes are closed now; but once more the lips move. "Pray!"

Jack looks imploringly at Millicent. She flushes faintly, but stands silent, with her gaze fixed upon the slowly-changing face.

He turns to Miss Purcell. "In a moment more he will be gone."

She looks at him with wide eyes; she pales; but she goes to the head of the couch and kneels. In a low, clear voice she commends to Christ the passing soul. It grows only a woman's tremulous sob at the close. The long, gasping sigh, the long shudder that shakes the couch, shakes her; and a deep voice just within the door pronounces for her a solemn Amen.

Jack assists her half fainting to her feet, turns her away from the pale form upon the bed, and takes her from the room; but she sees among the group Millicent's friend, Mr. Schumann. Jack bows to him gravely as they pass him; but he extends his hand with unmistakable cordiality.

Millicent herself tarries a moment. She thinks with sisterly hand to wipe the cold sweat from the white forehead, to close the pallid eyes before she goes.

But this is one of the womanly offices to which the hand of Miss Challis is unused. She has lived half of her life, but never before has she touched the dead. And now, as she lifts the locks of damp, disordered hair from the cold forehead, a faintness creeps over her. She turns blindly towards the casement.

Mr. Schumann hurriedly crosses the room to her. She feels his approach rather than sees it; she knows

little of physical ailment, and she wonders whether she is about to faint.

He draws her hand through his arm without a word. She has strength to indicate her lighted open room down the balcony. Then there is an instant, which is like a dream in the cool moonlit air, with the lap of the sea in her ears; and then she is alone in her room with Lina.

But did he say it, or was it a vagary of her giddy brain, and the sweetness of the moment but some physical delirium? "Is it not the arm, Millicent, upon which you should always have leaned?"

She lies in a half-waking state all night; lies with folded hands and stirless lids, and looks into the moonlight, and says the words over so many hours it is impossible to tell at last whether the question was his or her own.

CHAPTER XXII.

"UNFINISHED."

"Honor's a hasty word to speak,
But now I say it solemnly and slow."

THE necessity for Jack's presence in the little fishing village has ceased now, but still he stays, and Millicent finds an engrossing occupation in studying him, as day by day the fibres of the man's nature are laid bare. There is no unsteadiness about the hand that adjusts the microscopic lens. With a painless smile she realizes that it was *never* herself whom he has needed. Men of his class would not light their dwelling-places with a star if they could; the star is better set in the far-off sky, a point of light to which to lift their eyes in moments of aspiration and longing: for the ordinary purposes of life, a little common, cosy, cheerful candle were best. Trixie was not so much of a mistake, after all. And if his needs have deepened to a degree — Well, is not Lina Lina?

She accepts her own place in his life — the elder sister's place — with an utterly contented feeling, a feeling which has its share of pleasant and healthful sweetness. She is calmly glad to guide and to help. She cares no longer to shine and draw.

At last, as she comes to a true estimate here, so in

another study — no; in *this* case it is not a study; *intuitively* she gains her glimpses of that other nature, a nature of lofty, anthem-haunted cathedral spaces, over which a star might shine as over the forests, and mountains, and seas of a world. She looks back with a curious pity for that very girlish Millicent for whom the sunny contrast of the ready smile, the musical voice, the warm, gay, mocking manner, wrought such mischief. Yes, it was only for *her*. Ralph has gone his chosen way steadily enough; is all he would have been had she been true to him.

She flees speedily from this slightly bitter reflection. Otherwhere has she not rendered service? She believes that she has not dishonored the love which she has outgrown, nor the friendship and the aspiration which it has been her fate to inspire. She feels a sense of queenly strength in the long, brave battle she has made for others, even if she has won nothing, nothing for herself, save this sense of strength, and the blessed knowledge of what the safe may still do for the lost.

As she sits with folded hands, swaying to and fro in her rocking-chair in the balcony, she sees them drive up. They have been gone since morning.

Lina has her arms full of great green brakes, flaming lobelia blooms, and white, flowering, feathery marsh-growths, as she steps down from the carriage — they must have been miles inland, off among certain pathless solitudes she herself wots of. Lina might be — so bright and girlish she looks to-day — the young Mayday Corinna of Herrick's sweet rural verse, as she stands there, with her arms full of flowers, laughing, while Jack, the elegant, draws from under the seat a

great tin pail of blackberries, whose spicy fragrance she sniffs even up there; and altogether in their straw hats and their summer white they look a pair of happy, simple-minded picnicking rustics, instead of two who have fought in life's battles long and hard, and crawled away wounded, and maimed, and longing to die.

As she notes the roseate glow upon Lina's cheek, and catches the gay cadence of Jack's voice as he turns to go in with her, she wonders if he does really forget the limitations of his anomalous position; she thinks, with slightly curling lip, that she shall have to suggest them.

But neither of them seeks her. She hears Lina bestowing her floral treasures through the rooms below, hears the two as they pass through the hall on their way out to supper. Afterwards Lina plays and sings a long hour, and Jack accompanies her.

By and by, however, Jack comes up to his room. He comes out on the balcony after a while. A pungent whiff from his cigar proclaims him sitting just round the corner.

"Jack!"

He joins her at once. As she marks his face she fancies she might as well, perhaps, have left him to himself. She is not sure, however; and compassionate and charitable as Millicent has grown, there is a trace of the old judicial severity left in her disposition. She can, as well as Ralph himself, put the question by torture if need be.

They chat a moment upon indifferent topics, and then she says,—

"Jack, you have never told me, I think, how you like my companion, Miss Purcell."

Jack does not reply at first. His answer, when he does speak, is half soliloquy — evidently she has lately been in his thoughts.

"What think you of that little piece of verse of hers, Millicent? It sounds like a sob of despair, yet it is not. It is the woman herself. *He hears*, therefore rest content, therefore expect all things good. How do I like her?" he adds, rousing himself. "She's a rare little woman, Millicent, a rare little woman. She has a heart like a rose. She is as steady as a planet, in reality; but, like some of them, she glows with a rainbowy light — such an opalescent nature, so gentle, yet so penetrating! How true her conclusions are, and how delicate and satisfying her sympathy is! Why are not other women like her?"

Millicent very well remembers the old form of this question. She thinks of the change he has made in his pronouns, and smiles.

"My poor, frank, fickle, blundering Jack!"

"Jack," she says, gravely, "does Miss Purcell know your story? or do you think I ought not to ask you?"

"Yes, Millicent, you ought," he answers, after a pause. "Perhaps you ought a long time ago, besides. No, she does *not* know."

"Is this quite honorable, Jack?"

Jack groans, and there is another long pause. Then he says, —

"I have not meant to be a rascal, Millicent. I have not told her, I know, but truly I think there is no need; she would never cast a thought upon me."

"I do not know about that, Jack. Perhaps, however, it is *my* place, since she is in my care."

Millicent counts upon his permission, now that she

has requested it. But he sits silent. So ready with her own yes and no when any *point of oughtness* is in question, she chafes a moment in a great wonder and shame.

Then she flashes out upon him.

"Jack De Riemer, I thought you were a man of honor, for all, — at heart a man of honor!"

His face is turned away from her, but he puts out his hand with a gesture that silences her.

"Millicent, the struggle is hard enough without your forcing the end so hotly. Give me time, and you shall have no complaint to make. God only knows what I am going through these days. Try and believe that I shall not fail any one trust which you have placed in me. I have never intended to. But, although *I* cannot tell her, *you* need not. Millicent, if I give you my word that I will never seek her again, will it be too much, in my turn, to ask that she shall *never* know what a wretch I have been? For why *need* she know?"

"Poor, dear, true Jack, after all!"

It is shaping not *quite* as she could wish, not quite as she has planned it. But this, at least, is honor.

"Yes, Jack," she says, slowly, "when she is told you shall tell her."

By and by he leaves her, and by and by the music below grows silent, and Lina comes up. She brings Millicent a nosegay of the country blooms, a silver cup of the spicy wild berries, and, withal, sweet silence, silence that Millicent feels to be all sweet, fragrant life — a rose unclosing her great golden heart, perhaps.

She kisses Millicent upon either cheek, lights the lamp in the room within, and sits down at her own

little table. Her blue eyes are tender and smiling. There is a soft breath of song upon her lips as she takes up her pencil and her brushes. Upon a stray square of Bristol board she sketches, in outline, a lobelia flower and a fern leaf, faintly tints the strokes with scarlet and green, writes beneath the date — year, and day, and place. She puts away her colors and brushes, and seems to find infinite contentment in looking at her bit of work.

"Why unfinished?"

Lina smiles.

"Why not? when the sweetest portions of life are most beautiful when just in outline."

"Lina," Millicent says, suddenly, coming in as she speaks, "did you know that Jack was going away?"

The little song ceases now for the first time; between question and answer it has rippled on. The elder woman has tenderly understood, and tenderly she understands the silence.

With a slow hand Miss Purcell turns the face of her little picture downwards.

"To be unfinished forever? Ah, well, Miss Challis, as God will! Perhaps, you know, it would not bear filling out, even now — He knows." She smiles up in Miss Challis's eyes.

But all the same, presently, she leans her head upon the table. Millicent, silent, looks down and sees the tears lying beneath the closed lids. She stoops, lifts the heavy head to her shoulder.

"O, you poor Lina! I can read your heart; you love him, at last."

But Lina does not answer her.

Millicent says not a word more, for lack of wisdom.

She feels that she stands at the most mysterious point in the labyrinth. She dares not step. She has thought the end so near — the sunny, peaceful end! She believes still that it must be close at hand, but she dares not move.

She kisses the silent, tearful face.

"Yes, dear, as God wills!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WAY LINA WAS LOVED.

"'It is my wish,' he said, . . .
'To be with her till the great day
Peals on us with that music which rights all.'"

MILLICENT does not meet Jack again until the next morning as they are leaving the breakfast-room. He has absented himself from their little *tête-à-tête* table. There is a bunch of tea-roses by her plate, and there are fragrant Parma violets for Miss Purcell; but Jack himself is at the *table d'hote*.

Here is honor for her, since she has craved and demanded it so!

But he stands in waiting as they leave the breakfast room. He lets Miss Purcell pass with a silent bow; herself he intercepts, walks with her down the hall, and asks her to go out in the country with him. She looks at him attentively while he speaks, and decides that he, at least, can see to the end.

She dreads this drive somewhat, with her old dread of complications and personal responsibility; but she dresses hastily, nevertheless, avoids the eyes of her silent friend, and goes down stairs.

It is a pale, cool, gray day. Jack takes the high sea road, and for an hour they wind slowly along in

sight of the ocean, with its gray waste, its skimming birds, and its white sails. Jack is a silent companion this morning. His face is one to turn from, and Millicent turns from it. She leans back in the carriage, and looks at nothing but the rocks. She likes not the sea this morning; likes not the birds that skim, and dart, and disappear, and never sing, nor the boats and ships that venture over the horizon's rim into a harborless waste, nor the waves that seem a million of mocking mouths rejoicing over the folly of man's living at all. She will be glad when they turn off among the peaceful, mown meadows, and the happy orchards, and ricks, and the singing, nesting land birds, and the glad homes.

By and by, in the distance, up among the rocks, coming towards them, she descries a sombre figure, whom she speedily recognizes.

The recognition at the same distance is mutual. The solitary man on foot well knows the pearly dress and veil. In the slow carriage winding down the rocky highway, they gleam out as vividly as her rose-hued apparel on that memorable day so many years ago. He also knows it to be tall Jack De Riemer by her side very well — as then.

He himself is on his way to call upon the lady. He does not know Jack's story. He has given considerable thought to his presence in the village. He has heard the gossip of the hamlet, in which it is current that the tall lawyer wears Miss Purcell's colors, and certain observations and psychological studies of his own confirm him in an interesting theory; but the day at Willowwater repeats itself so vividly before his eyes, during these moments of approach, that he seems

involved in a kind of double life, and about to repeat the fatal drama. He is momentarily tempted to turn aside.

But he does not; and he has time to gather his strength and to observe the two as they draw near. It is quite the old picture of a perfect pair; but he grows very certain that Jack De Riemer does not occupy his ancient position, and it brings the flush to his sallow cheek that, meeting him, Millicent should grow oblivious of her handsome cavalier, and wait silently to bestow upon him such grave and studious recognition. If it is the same day, and the same situation, and the actors the same, it is the same with a difference that satisfies him.

The air is clear with coming rain, and the soft, fresh breeze bears back the voices from the carriage to the pedestrian. It is Jack who is speaking.

"Grave old 'Roger!' it seems odd enough to meet him here, and as a stranger. How he looked at me, to be sure, as if I still meant him mischief!"

There is a spice of the old, light audacity in the tone that Millicent has not heard for years; that the startled clergyman remembers very well of his ancient pupil. He fervently hopes, undignified as the wish may be, that he may hear the lady's reply. He does. It is given in the icy tone in which — God forgive her now! — she so often spoke to *him* during that last year.

"Jack, I am really tempted to never forgive you this! *Mischief!* Were you free, and a thousand times Jack De Riemer, concerning me you never again could make mischief!"

Both men hear these words with tingling cheeks.

Ralph passes on, and Jack, both startled and shocked, cries out, —

"Millicent, for Heaven's sake, don't take me up like this! You don't need to tell me that you despise me; I hold you as far above me as even *you* could wish. It was but a bit of pleasantry — the man glared so. And I had brought you out here to prove to you that I am not quite the despicable scamp I appear fated to seem to you!"

There are humility, and suffering, and passionate beseeching in both his look and tone; and, as of old, Millicent is fain to forgive him, fain to forgive her discarded idol that he is made of clay — poor, merry, mocking, mistake-making Jack, to waste anger upon him! The tears come into her beautiful eyes. She shows him by her air and smile that she does quite forgive him; and she does, indeed, forgive him, freely and tenderly, as one forgives one's own flesh and blood.

Then Jack speaks to her long and seriously.

"Millicent," he says, "my mind is quite made up, and now I want your active advice and assistance. I want you to help me reconcile my wife. I want to know where she is — I *must* know now, and I *will* know! I wish to have an interview with her. I want to persuade her to place her happiness in my hands once more, and I want you, if you have any confidence in me, to help me persuade her — it is the earnest, eloquent Millicent I want, mind you."

He has taken Millicent's breath quite away.

"Ah, ah!" she says to herself, as the great waves of gratitude and thanksgiving flow over her.

But when she speaks, it is quietly, as usual.

"But, first, Jack, do you love her? for if you do not — "

Jack turns away. But Millicent, who means to be wise and cool, now that she has the clew again in her hands, waits for his reply.

"No, Millicent," he says at last, "I will make a clean breast of it to you. It is not *her* I love. I love your Lina, that gentle, bright, pure Miss Purcell, and God knows that the breath in which I say it will not dim her name. It is such a love as even you, Millicent, would freely forgive me, since I can think of nothing in her pure presence save my dishonored manhood and my duty. I have loved her until there is no peace and rest for me save in doing my duty, save in atonement and reparation. For her sweet sake, Millicent, I can do it. I dare not think of her and do less than to seek out my poor, wronged Trixie, and build up again the home I desecrated. I should feel no right to cherish even her memory and do less. Will you help me, Millicent?"

It is "the earnest, eloquent Millicent" that makes answer.

"Yes, dear Jack, I will."

"You think, then, that she *can* be persuaded to see me — I gather it from your tone, Millicent. If she only would! If the child could only know with what remorse, with what tender yearning, I constantly think of her; a tenderness that is almost love, it is so deep! If she sorrows over our broken home and blighted lives, our tarnished names, as I do, she *would* trust me, she *would* try me, she *would* do her womanly share. Millicent, tell me, do you truly think she *will* see me?"

"I will ascertain as speedily as possible, Jack."

"Does she ever speak of me? Surely, Millicent, it

is my right to know now; or can I never earn the right with you? You make me feel, with those great gray eyes, that I never can. Well, *I* don't know, I am sure, what life-long penalties *may* attach to such sin as mine."

The great gray eyes turn away. She is silent. She does not lighten his sense of sin. She thinks that this cleansing cautery, this keen knife, is good for the man, good for the light, mocking nature.

She could, would she, tell him sweet secrets. She herself knows of a *portefeuille* where certain dry reports of law cases, cut from newspapers, are stored; she knows of the printed slips containing his name and his praise, which are carried about in Trixie's porte-monnaie; but she fancies these will be best and dearest proofs won from Trixie's own keeping.

"Jack," she says at last, "I think you must make your own quest. I will ascertain if she will see you, I will notify you of her decision, and I will convince her that *I* believe in you fully; the rest, naturally, must be of your own winning, dear Jack."

Yes, she does believe in him fully, for the first time since, O, so many years ago! She feels a great unselfish joy as she recognizes that here is the true love which she failed to inspire; the love which will, at last, nay, which *has* already, made Jack the knightly gentleman. Here are honor and manliness, at last, whose completeness satisfies even her high requirement; honor and manliness which can answer for the safety and permanence of home henceforth, even if a great happy love was not to be there; manliness that takes all blame upon its own broad shoulders; manliness that scorns to remember who else has sinned, or to demand apology, penance, or promise.

Surely she needs not count her life wasted, since she has brought the two souls to this point.

"Ah, Ralph," she thinks, "if I understand you, you would not now have it otherwise. You would, for these sakes, have had the sacrifice made; these sakes," she adds, with sudden humility — "Jack's, hers, *and mine!*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT THE COUNTRY INN.

"So she came in: I am long in telling it.
I never yet beheld a thing so strange,
Sad, sweet, and strange together."

IT is but three days after this that Millicent and Miss Purcell leave their summer retreat. It is understood that Miss Challis goes to make her usual visit at Newport, where the Philadelphia Challises are established, but that she will not, as usual, return for her long autumnal stay.

Jack is to leave on the morrow, going southward to the little town where he has this morning received permission to call upon his wife.

Millicent bids him Godspeed with her good-byes, and then she accords him a moment alone to wish Miss Purcell farewell.

Jack acutely feels all the subtile change in her manner towards him. All his heart is in his resolve to be worthy of her trust and respect.

"There is no madness in my heart to cause you disquiet. Instead, I were a braver, better man my life through, Millicent, could I see her each day."

He looks frankly into her searching gray eyes as he tells her this.

Still he has it in his thoughts, as he goes back into the parlor where Miss Purcell stands drawing on her gloves, to tell her, in some manly sort, what blessed weeks these have been in his life; but, as he takes her hand, and looks into her gentle face, and the faint rose comes into her thin cheeks, a vision of home with her as its mistress sweeps over him, — the long days, the long evenings, — and heaven itself opens before him to tempt him from his duty.

"Mine, mine, my own!" his whole soul cries out, impetuously, as he bends over her for a moment.

The world and heaven both grow dark, and duty and honor dim; then suddenly he releases the soft, cold fingers without a word, and leaves her.

A moment after, and he seats the two in the carriage, with light words bids them gallant adieu, stands with lifted hat as they look back, and feels that *this* too is legitimate portion and parcel of his manifold punishment — that she should think, as she goes, that she is no more to him than any pleasant summer acquaintance.

"*You!* well, God grant, 'lily Elaine,' that you never know how false a Lancelot held your hand in that 'discourtesy of farewell,' if discourtesy you deemed it!"

For his heart of hearts aches with a strange, new disquiet and shame. In the same breath in which he despises himself he thrills as he recalls the final glance of those blue eyes, gently sweet with pleasure in his presence, "unto this last." He feels that her latest look at him, as she leaned forward from the carriage with Millicent, was a keen, sad glance of wonder and question; and, cowering before all his past dishonor, and this, its latest consequence, this modern knight is

fain to pray a most bitter-sweet prayer that this sweet "Elaine" may forget him, face and name.

Ah, honor, honor! an eagle's wing, as of youth and the morning, for him who has not sinned. But for the recreant, evermore a thousand-bladed sword ever turning inward, with its bright and cruel edges, upon heart and soul, upon memory and hope alike.

That night he preserves a lonely vigil within the starless, moonless balcony which the two bright presences have deserted.

The cautery, the keen knife, complete their work. He thanks God in his deepest soul that he has known two such women as Millicent Challis and Lina Purcell, and, musing of them, a great, pitiful tenderness steals over him towards his poor child-wife, that she should be so unlike them, so young, so weak. No, he has never thought of her as Millicent has spoken of her, "a noble woman, and happy in many pursuits." Of necessity, remembering her, it has been "words, words."

But to-night he makes himself a promise, and thrills with his own deep purpose in the making, that he will strive to lead the bright simple girl towards their heights. He resolves, also, that she shall never be taken back among the old scenes; he shields her, even in his thoughts, with an angry pity and care, from aught that would bring her in conjunction with those two rare and perfect women.

He snatches an hour's broken sleep upon the bamboo lounge in the balcony, and then, in the gray, misty dawn, at the door of their silent and deserted rooms, he lives through a moment of exquisite sadness, takes beautiful dreams and tender companionships by the

hand, bids them farewell forever, — the life that might have been, farewell forever, — and then he comes down into the unknown highway of duty and sets forward.

At ten he leaves the railway for the stage, to go still farther inland and southward. At noon he gets off the coach at the small country place designated by Millicent. He walks up along white-paled gardens, and venerable mossy orchards, and low-roofed houses, by a footpath, to the small, white, sleepy-looking house, which the absence of fence and front yard, and the presence of a watering tank and pen-stock, proclaim to be the hotel.

"Hollyhocks and marigolds, bachelor-buttons and asters!" he exclaims, with a smile relaxing his grave mouth. "Shade of my grandmother! — there's fennel, dill, and caraway too! hidden, indeed! yes, the child knew how, I'll confess. I never should have searched for her here!"

He twists his mouth as he remembers her gay tastes, and casts a glance upon the small weather-beaten church, the one store, the little idle shoe and blacksmith shops, and hears the peaceful, drowsy ding-dong! ding-dong! of the cow-bells down the road. He has not supposed such a rare bit of mediæval America still in existence.

Entering the tiny hostelry, he institutes, feeling somewhat strange sensations the while, certain needful and prescribed inquiries. He can scarcely reconcile himself to the landlord's ready answer: "Yes, a lady, a Mrs. De Riemer she called herself, I believe, as you say, is up stairs. She come in the stage last night. Like to speak with her? I'll go up, if you wish."

It is almost too much to find her here, after all! He turns away from the waiting Boniface, and walks to the door. Poor Trixie — these first thoughts of his, fortunately, will never be avowed to you!

But what did the man say? *Came in the stage?* So, then, this is not her retreat. She has preserved *that* a secret with a caution which bodes uncertain success to the interview. This feeling does much towards restoring him to his habitual mood. She manifests here the same resolution, the same cold dislike and distrust, with which, through Millicent, she has steadily refused him interview or correspondence through all the years of their separation.

He begins to dread personal contact with this cold spirit, now that it is so near; and he is not unduly impatient at the message which the landlord brings in reply to the one which he has sent — that the lady requests an hour longer for rest before she comes down.

He is shown into the stuffy private parlor, and left to himself among the family pictures, the portraits of generals and presidents, the fading asparagus, and the paper window-shades — a fit place, truly, for life to narrow to a point. He can well believe here that there is nothing beyond but the dusty highway. He throws open a window. It looks out upon a vegetable garden, and a row of pear trees, and a clothes-line full of flapping sheets. There is a woman washing at a neighboring back door, and a child clambering up the chair, — a little, bare-armed, bare-legged woman in miniature, — with a doll's dress in her hand, which she evidently proposes to add to the family wash. Jack turns away from the prosperous garden, which is like

a Dutch painting in the smoky sunshine, with its great blue-green cabbages, and its ripening beets, and thinning trellises. The faint, mellow fragrance of the pears and apples sickens him. He paces to and fro, and tries to breathe in the new atmosphere. He has at last come down out of the mountains and amid the pines, from the presence of the moon, and the stars, and the sea, *to this!*

He throws himself down upon the sofa, and burying his face in his hands, he makes endeavor to realize that he is really Jack De Riemer; that it is life, and no dream; and to gain again some central self-control against the coming hour.

As the minutes pass he tries to imagine how it will probably seem to see her for the first moment; and to remember the moment so long ago to which it is, at last, to be linked. He dwells upon the scenes of that night with torturing minuteness and prolixity. He softens none of Millicent's adjectives. Yes, how *brutally* he hushed the innocent titter of the poor little humming-bird! how *brutally* he pushed her within the pretty nest, and set his iron heel upon it — wife, home, honor, and all!

"Good Heavens! how *can* I face her!"

He springs up and resumes his uneasy walk. He feels hopeless concerning his task; hopeless that he shall ever convince her of his shame and contrition.

"I could, of course, if she loved me. But doubtless she will listen to me like a stranger — a prejudiced one at that. I have no right to expect anything else."

He pauses before the mirror set in the faded asparagus, and considers the man and his chances for winning the pretty smile, the pretty blush, the childish eager-

ness of kiss and caress, which he remembers so well. The grave man shakes his head at him, warningly.

"I won her with sunshine, I remember. A poor playfellow I should make now; and that was what I still think she needed, Millicent to the contrary, notwithstanding."

He realizes that, at the best, it will be but an elder brother's grave care and tenderness that he shall have to give her; but he means that *that* shall be constant and falterless.

While he stands by the mirror, his broad brow burning a low red with manly shame that it should be no more than that which he is to give her, and feeling, as he remembers Millicent's sweet and generous praise, as Geraint did after driving his Enid before him in faded silk and in rags (even as the poor child herself discerned) that

"His work is neither wonderful nor great" —

At this moment of noble shame the door uncloses, and he hears it, and turns. It is she. "My wife!" he says, huskily, as he has a thousand times planned to say when rehearsing this scene, and advances towards the small figure in black. At the third step he pauses. It is *not* his wife. No. But as little is it that momentary apparition — Miss Purcell.

There is an instant which is neither of this world nor the other, of daylight nor dream. The face is surely hers; the gentle blue eyes, the thin white cheeks, the sweet, drooping, childish mouth, and the black dress, and the black cross at the white throat, all belong to Miss Purcell; but this woman's head is clustered over with short, bronze-brown hair, in bright, silken, tendrilly confusion.

All this long moment she stands gazing at him. She trembles, pales, flushes. Millicent has not spared her this sweet and terrible pain. Lina or Trixie, whichever she be, she does not know that she is beloved. Just as the whole blessed truth dawns upon Jack, she falters and turns away.

But he is at her side, his face a dazzle of light.

"Blind! blind! *how* blind! Ah, well, my precious Lina, you know it all — *will* you come?"

But by and by, as he looks down at her, he grows pale and grave again. "Ah, how you have suffered, my poor darling, to have changed you thus! — grown into this angel beauty as by death. Is that, indeed, the only way, my Lina?"

She turns her face downward upon his shoulder at these last words. A sob breaks from her lips. "O, my husband, *is it only Lina*, after all? O, if you can, pray love a little that poor, sinning Trixie! Let that little name be redeemed and purified in my eyes; let me be to you *Trixie*, loved and forgiven!"

His voice trembles with tenderness. "*You* pleading to *me!*" As he folds his arms about her the great tears drop. "God bless you, Millicent Challis, for this six years' work, forever and forever!"

CHAPTER XXV.

I KNOW IT, RALPH.

"But if into one lot there came
(As into one I haply knew)
The flower's scent, the forest's force,
The depth's reserve, the ripple's hue;
If it fill out to Heaven's mind
To give one both the sweet and true, —"

MISS CHALLIS has returned to Willowwater. She has come quite alone. She has gently refused to see again either Jack or her own precious Lina. She feels that it is better for them both, despite their exceeding and overflowing happiness, not to be too soon reminded of the past, and to begin the new life in a new home.

So the De Riemer place, so long in the hands of an agent, is at last sold; and the old name is to cease now out of the life around her. The two go south at once, where, indeed, every one, save a couple of the Challis servants and Cornie Vandeburg, has long supposed Mrs. De Riemer to be living. It is to be gradually known now that the husband and wife are reunited, — where, and when, and how, is not to be certainly ascertained, — and that Millicent's friend, Miss Purcell, has gone with them.

Yes, the end of the labyrinth has finally been reached

— the two have gone away along the open, sunny path. We need think only of Millicent herself.

Ah, it was a sore wrench to give up so utterly the girl who has loved her so, who has grown into noble womanhood under her care, whom her own hand has led up the heights!

As she sits here, solitary, by the library fire, her life seems to her as waiting to be begun afresh, as on that other autumnal day, nearly six years ago, when Cornie Vandeburg came riding up the avenue upon her merciful and womanly errand.

Cornie Vandeburg — a tender sort of smile wreathes Millicent's lips, and her eyes drop musingly. She *is*, as Jack used to tell her, indeed, quite as true and womanly as herself — perhaps at the one or two points where their lives have come in contact, she herself has gained bright light and sweet wisdom, and the moment has marked an era of fresh growth. She has learned much of her during these years from little Trixie, who had intuitively divined all the virtues of her character. From her she has learned that Jack, in those other years, went to her with the Challis solicitude — maternal and sisterly — concerning Cecil's growing bondage to the social wine-cup, and in his gay familiarity, dared lay some of the feminine Challis views before her; and that she, seeing with her own eyes the danger, for womanhood's honor and manhood's sake, banished all liquors from her mother's sideboard, and set her face resolutely against them otherwheres. Millicent, judicially, concedes her exceeding sweetness of disposition; and personally, this afternoon, is glad that she may feel a glow of pride concerning her, by reason of these memories.

Having slowly read through this long foreign letter which lies upon her lap, and her great surprise and sorrow having subsided, she calls these memories up afresh, and soothes herself with them greatly.

She is, shortly, going up stairs to prepare to call upon her. She gazes into the fire with a thoughtful face, but she does not curl her delicate lip, as once she might.

Though Miss Challis herself may feel that she need not hasten to speak of it, it may as well be known here that she has learned from this letter that Miss Vandeburg, accompanied by her mother and father, is to sail next month for Europe; and that Cecil is to meet them in London, and there make the lady his wife and her sister.

Ah, well, she will confess her a brave, strong, and superior woman. She is fain also to remember that this Miss Vandeburg forgives this Cecil Challis — Challis though he be — some grievous sins. She rings and orders the carriage, and promises herself that she will not fail the situation in any one of its difficult requirements.

But, of course, this closes her own dream of foreign housekeeping with her brother. A Mrs. Cecil of this order, indeed, *any* Mrs. Cecil, shuts her up to the old home, the old, solitary existence, since she chooses to avail herself of none of life's ordinary alleviations.

When, at last, she goes up stairs to dress, she passes by the tower apartments, and goes on into the wing chambers. These were Lina's rooms. They are just as Lina left them when they went to the sea-side — they will remain so.

This one is the study. Certain of the old books

stand on the carved Swiss shelves, — she has retained them, and sent her fresh copies, — and certain others lie open upon the tables. Upon these tables there is precious litter — scraps and letters, rewritten passages of *MSS.* sheets interlined and revised under the two pairs of eyes — sweet mementos of the sunny laborious days of the last year. She opens a secret drawer of the *escritoire*, and smiles upon its contents — treasures which she has brought home with her and placed therein. There is a little silken hair-net; and there are bands, and braids, and coils of pale golden hair — the slight, harmless mask under whose shelter the poor, frightened, despairing child-wife grew to be that fair, sweet, wise Miss Purcell.

Entering her own rooms, she still puts off dressing. She sits down before the old ebony writing-desk. She takes out a thin package of letters — only three. They are of recent date, and bear a New England postmark. They are each duly noted as answered, according to Millicent's orderly habit. As she idly touches these letters here and there, she fancies this new correspondence will have to be the sole pleasure of the long winter. She is glad it is one which will demand of her thought and painstaking.

She has, indeed, other letters from the same correspondent; but she re-reads only these. The package with the pensive yellow tint that time turns such unread letters, lies within her hand's reach. She feels a strong longing this afternoon to take them up, to look them over. But she does not. Instead, she opens the last letter of the new series, and thinks the while how it is the only door into the past which has not closed, or is not closing. How strange it is that she should

be left alone with *him!* But they have, indeed, all gone their ways without her; and the proud, sweet woman feels an inexpressible tenderness towards this old friend, because he walks with her a little way through the early loneliness.

She turns to the closing paragraph.

"I may — I cannot tell yet — be delegated to the coming convention in Chicago within the month. In that event I shall pass near you. Might I not call upon you, in passing, friend Millicent?"

"Friend Millicent" has replied; has accorded the permission quite as quietly as it has been requested. She has not been notified further — she only knows that he *may* come within the month.

She looks at her watch, and, at last, rises to dress for the call upon Miss Vandeburg.

As this little ordeal draws nearer, conflicting feelings concerning it again trouble her. She is quite aware that she can render the gay, good girl's way a path of roses, if she does but choose. She knows how happy and grateful she can thus make her brother. She knows her duty as a woman; and she is not at all thankful for the touch of the ancient family haughtiness which she feels.

She recalls a certain soft, shy, beautiful expression which came into the eyes of this handsome prospective sister-in-law, last Sabbath at church, as they met; and as she stands musing upon all the sweet and varied emotion which it might mean, the little look quite melts through to her woman's heart and decides her. She dresses herself in quiet apparel.

"No, I will *not* descend upon them in cold state. In discharging this duty I could make it all so unkind!

The call shall be as it ought — from the sister upon the sister and her friends — quite *en famille.*"

She is back again in the library, waiting for tea, and ready to go out after that is over, when she hears a ring at the great hall bell. She thinks of Ralph at once. Impulsively, upon the instant, she steps outside — indeed, it is all quite as it used to be at sixteen. So it is not strange, or at the most only like a twice-dreamed dream, that it should really be Ralph Schumann whom the servant admits.

She is still under the sway of those gentler thoughts concerning her duties in all their depth and breadth towards her future sister-in-law; and perhaps her face and air both have a sweetness, and softness, and warmth which are to be held accountable for precipitating what follows.

She waits for him there with a smile, at the end of the long, gay avenue of flowers and pictures; the library door stands open; the fire crackles cosily within; the day is dark, and the firelight on the walls is rosy and warm, and all things breathe of home-coming and welcome. She goes now a graceful step to meet him, gives him her hand, and turns back with the words of all words, that one would say Millicent Challis would never utter, —

"How like the old times, Ralph!"

Or did she not say it? Was it only the intensely vivid thought of both? Be that as it may, she is such a fair, sweet woman in the dim, rosily-lighted room, there is not overmuch reason to wonder at Ralph in the coming moment. He has kept her hand; and it is he that closes the door, like the master instead of

the guest. He has not spoken at all yet, but now he speaks.

"Millicent," he says, "*make* it the old times! O, my darling, it has been so many years, and still you have not yet been loved, nor ever will be, as *I* have loved you!"

She does not withdraw her hand; and after a moment he turns her to the light. She bears his gaze with her sweet, frank smile.

"I know it, Ralph," she says, gently.

That is all.

Only, just as they are going out to tea, and he has the slender white hand in his, he lifts the ringless fingers and looks at them. He glances at the library table.

"It was on *that* corner you laid it down — was it not?"

"Yes, Ralph. O, forgive me!"

"Could you find it now, do you think?" he asks, as with one look he grants her something more than forgiveness.

She is silent for a moment. She rebels a little in her heart at these ways of the lord and master.

But, nevertheless, as they pass out into the hall, she slips from his side and runs up to her room. And there in the twilight, in the great crimson tower window, she does proud penance for her sin. She places upon her own finger, in sweet humility, the broad golden circlet which she herself once removed.

"No more than I *ought!*" she says.

And the call upon Cornie is, indeed, quite *en famille*.

THE END.

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